On the Battlefield?: Using Cultural Schemas to Navigate the Racial Terrain of College

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
(Public Policy and Sociology)
in the University of Michigan
2019

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DEDICATION

To Sunrise.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The journey to the words on these pages has been an arduous one. I am so grateful to so many people for their support in getting me here. It is an honor to say thank you to those who have believed in me and helped me along the way, even when I could not see the path.

Thank you to those whose stories fill these pages. Thank you for your honesty, your patience, your willingness to engage and to give me a chance. Thank you for persevering and finding a way to survive and thrive on your campus and in life.

I am grateful to my committee for their support, patience, and guidance. Alford A. Young Jr. has been a steady force throughout this process for me. Kristin Seefeldt made me feel like my work was important and that I was on the right track. I am grateful to Elizabeth Armstrong for her helpful feedback and responsiveness. Karyn Lacy's work was some of the first sociology I read that make me feel like I had a place in this field. Each committee member's contribution to my work and my development as a scholar is incredibly important to me.

During my time at Michigan I was fortunate enough to find several sources of community and support. Thank you to the Ford School of Public Policy, especially the Public Policy and International Affairs program. Thank you to the Racism Lab, the Center for Research on Learning and Teaching, and the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. My time in these spaces has made me a better teacher, scholar, and administrator. Thank you to Drs. Carla O'Connor, Shobita Parthasarathy and Maggie Hicken for your mentorship.

I would like to thank the Scholars and staff at Leadership Enterprise for a Diverse America. Working with these Scholars has provided endless motivation as I am in awe of their energy, drive, ambition, and sense of purpose. Their belief in me contributed greatly to my ability to get this work done. I also feel indebted to the city of New Orleans for allowing me to embrace it as home while I wrote these words. I am forever inspired by the spirit of this city.

Countless colleagues and friends provided accountability, support, and laughs throughout the years. Thank you to Sociology department friends Anh Nguyen, Nelson Saldana, Matthew Alemu, Charity Hoffman, Christina Cross, Tia Clinton, Gabrielle Peterson, Aya Waller-Bey and many more. Thank you to the AUC crew for making the first years of graduate school more fun than I thought was possible. A special thank you to Chauncey Smith and Tissyana Camacho for holding me down since we were 23 sittin' on 23 bills. Thank you to LaGina Gause for letting me follow in your footsteps. Thank you to so many more in Michigan, Kansas, Oklahoma, Louisiana, and all over the world who have loved me, prayed for me, laughed with me, let me cook for them, and supported me throughout this process.

When I needed them most, Gabrielle Horton and Dina Emam came into my life. Thank you for showing up for me. I am thankful for Kristen Brown being my roommate and friend throughout this process. Countless hours sitting across the table from her helped mold me into the scholar and person I am today.

I could not have achieved this, or any milestone, without my three favorite people: Mommy, Daddy, Seester. My family has always ensured that I know that I am loved, supported, provided for, thought well of, and cared for. Their unquestioning faith in my abilities, patience

throughout this process, and unconditional love are why I am here. I cannot say thank you enough. I am so blessed to be your family.

None of this would be possible without Him who is able to do far more than we can ask or think. Thank you God for your guidance, protection, and love.

Kennedy Alexandra Turner, I am so proud of you. You did it. You are living the life of your prayers, hopes, and dreams. Keep going.

And I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year:
"Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown"
And he replied:
"Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the Hand of God."
That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way.

PREFACE

The title of this dissertation holds multiple meanings. One, it is a quote from a respondent that illustrates their worldview of what it means to be black on a college campus. The other meaning is far more personal and signifies my journey to this work, my family and my faith.

"I am on the battlefield, for my Lord, for my Lord. And I promise Him that I, I will serve Him 'til I die, I am on the battlefield, for my Lord."

Hearing these words immediately transports me to Sunrise Baptist Church — to my Uncle Monroe, my grandmother's brother, leading devotion in the small church that was started by my great-great-grandparents. The words "On the Battlefield" conjure warm memories of home, of community, of faith, of love, and of family. Memories of squeezing into the wooden pews of Sunrise Baptist Church, with my mother and older sister, while my father, his brothers, and his cousins stand at the front of the church. My mother, sister and I playfully singing along, lovingly imitating the cadence of the black Baptist deacons who stand before us.

Sunrise Baptist Church was founded over 115 years ago by Ewing Monroe McKissic and his wife Ella. According to family legend, Papa Kissic ran away from enslavement in Virginia as a teen, and settled in the small, rural, Oklahoma town of Ardmore. To this day, the church sits on the corner of K St. and Grand Avenue, and has been the literal cornerstone of my family. The 400 block of K St. was the block inhabited by the descendants of Monroe McKissic, who every Sunday walked up the street to Sunrise for morning service.

In southern Oklahoma, Sunrise was a port in the storm for Ardmore's black community. As my Uncle Malcolm put it in a song that he wrote about the church, "At Sunrise, there is joy. At Sunrise, all your troubles are cast aside." So while Sunrise holds religious significance in my life, it also is the most singular representation of family and community that I know. The presence of that building sitting on that corner of that block serves as a physical manifestation of my family's history in this country. From a runaway slave down to me, my family's story is the story of sunrise.

"I was alone and idle, and I was a sinner too. 'Til I heard the voice from Heaven, saying there is work to do."

The journey of this dissertation is deeply personal. The completion of this body of work marks a victory that I did not always believe I could achieve. My biggest opposition throughout this was myself, and in these pages lie the testimony of this triumph. As I was on my personal battlefield, it is the strength imbued in me by those who sang hymns at Sunrise who got me through. It is the support of my family, the pride in their eyes, and their unwavering faith in God, in me, and in us, that gave me what I needed to win. I spent far too many nights feeling alone. I spent far too many days being idle. But because of the strength and love of my family, I was able to heed that voice and get to work.

There are many parallels between my family's story at Sunrise and the larger black American story. I am so grateful to have been shown the beauty, strength, struggle, joy, and grace of black life at Sunrise. Because of this, I am me. Because of Sunrise, I enter the battlefield confident in who I am and whose I am. My love for black people and my deep desire to see us all win is born out of the moments at Sunrise.

"Now when I met my Savior, I met Him with a smile, He healed my wounded Spirit, and owned me as His child. Around the throne of grace, He appoints my soul a place, I'm on the battlefield for my Lord."

I hope that everyone, especially those who have given me their time and shared their stories on these pages, has the opportunity to know the love of a place like Sunrise. To feel seen, honored, cherished, respected, cared for, and thought well of. To be celebrated and to be given the opportunity to be the very best version of one's self. I want that for the student's whose stories fill these pages, and all who are on their personal battlefields.

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the racial sensemaking of black college students. The following research questions guide this project: How do black college students conceptualize their racial identity and make sense of the racial landscape of their university? How does the use of a particular schema matter for the college experience of these students? I argue that these students are utilizing cultural schemas of racial identity to make sense of the racial terrain of college. These shared, publicly available schemas help students interpret who they are and their place in their society. Based on forty-one interviews with twenty-six students, I find three main cultural schemas that students are using to interpret their racial identity: Commanders, Ambassadors, and Conscientious Objectors. The Commanders see campus as a battlefield and focus on supporting other black people to prepare for the battle. Ambassadors see race relations as a diplomatic mission, and focus on the ways in which they can serve as positive examples and liaisons between the black and white worlds. Conscientious Objectors see the racial battle happening around them, and purposely keep themselves out of the fray, choosing to focus instead on their individual characteristics. In this dissertation I argue that adherence to these schemas is not fully dictated or prescribed by social class, pre-college experiences, gender, or ethnicity as previous work suggests. Instead, these cultural schemas are publicly available to all respondents. Respondents social location matters for how they take up these schema, and not necessarily which schema they adhere to. This case study of how individuals navigate mobility enhancing institutions has implications for our understanding of racial identity, as well as higher education scholars and practitioners.

CHAPTER I.
Introduction

"Sometimes it just feels like you have to go to war. Like everybody is against you so you have to always be ready to fight." Rukayat leaned back in her seat and put her hands in the air as she told me about her daily experiences fighting racism on her college campus. "You have to always be ready because they'll always try you if you let them." The "they" in her sentence refers to white people, whom she deems as her adversary in a tense battle for humanity on campus and beyond. "You have to fight for them to see you like a person, almost. It's exhausting." Rukayat did not necessarily refer to a physical fight, but to standing up for herself with her words and deeds, by being constantly vigilant about how people spoke to her and to make sure that she interjected when she saw any perceived slights or causes of racism. She fought by making sure she affirmed herself and her friends, praising their beauty, their brilliance, and their resilience, and in doing so kept them equipped for the battles she saw ahead of them. Rukayat's comparison of going through college as going through war provides a deep insight into how she understands herself and society.

As colleges and universities across the country increasingly focus on challenges of diversity, equity, and inclusion (U.S. Department of Education 2016), they seek to make their universities feel less like battlefields for their students. But as they do so, it is important to consider the numerous ways in which black student experience varies. If you have Rukayat, or students like her, tell you what it is like to be black on campus, she will regale you with tales of

exclusion, by professors, classmates, and roommates, and stories of a community of black students determined to help each other succeed against all odds.

If you ask a student like Lauren what it is like to be black on campus, she will tell you "it's fine really. I just try to do the best I can and be the best example I can be. I figure if I treat people well and get to know them, and let them get to know me, I can show them that black people are cool people too and that we have a lot to offer." In this way Lauren positions herself as a diplomat extending herself to bridge the gap around campus and beyond. Lauren, and students like her see themselves as a go between, working to change perceptions of black people through their positive example and willingness to engage across racial lines.

Still other students, such as Timothy, would tell you that they do not even think about being black on campus. "I don't really think about it. I just have so much other stuff going on. I know some people do, but I don't really see much need to think about stuff like that." For Timothy and students like him, thinking about race did not seem necessary or productive. If anything, to think and talk about race was to play into an outdated paradigm.

These quotes highlight the variation in these students' understanding of their racial identity, and how those understandings guide how they engage with their social world. One hearing these students may assume that they come from very different social backgrounds and as a result of their ethnicity, social class, pre-college exposure to interracial environments, gender or any number of demographic factors they have developed these divergent racial ideologies. However, these three students have much more in common than they do not. They are all second-generation immigrants from middle to upper middle class households. They have at least one parent who completed undergraduate and graduate education. These students grew up in integrated environments and were in the racial minority in their K-12 schools. Yet, as these

students are moving through the same university, they are interpreting the structural conditions using very different schemas. Thus, they are understanding themselves and society differently, and as such, their decisions on how to act vary as well. During this time in college, these students are learning to navigate the racial terrain. For some, this is a battlefield or site of war, for others this is a diplomatic mission, and for others, this is a site of protest on the sidelines. It is this variation in racial sensemaking that I will explore in this dissertation.

Based on forty-one interviews with twenty-six college students at an elite public university, I ask the following research questions: How do black college students conceptualize their racial identity and make sense of the racial landscape of their university? How does the use of a particular schema matter for the college experience of these students? I argue that these students are utilizing cultural schemas of racial identity to make sense of the racial terrain of college. These shared, publicly available schemas help students interpret who they are and their place in their society. I do not argue that one particular schema is better for navigating college than another, rather I demonstrate that each way of interpreting what it means to be black carries with it different strengths that position the individuals to receive cognitive, social, and material rewards. Adopting a schema unlocks potential pathways in college, namely in terms of peer relationship and campus organizations, while blocking others. Through this line of inquiry, I aim to contribute to our understanding of the variation in the meaning they derive from their black racial identity, and make the case for cultural schemas as a way to interrogate the ways in which ideology is developed beyond the sum of ones' background characteristics and social location. In showing how these students inhabit this particular mobility enhancing institution, we can see how they make sense of race in a particular space.

As this study is set within the social world of one university, we can see the ways in which the university sets the material conditions within which these schemas are diffused. These students are navigating and defining what it means to be black with and against each other. In understanding how these students approach college as a battle, a diplomatic mission, or a protest of racial norms, we can better understand how this generation of the prospective black middle class is developing. This work also has implications for higher education scholars and professionals, as the use of racial identity schema are shaping not only how they evaluate their college experience, but also how they engage in peer networks, campus organizations, and if and how students contribute to diversity and inclusion efforts. In what follows, I will introduce key literature on black racial identity and cultural schemas, making the case for cultural schemas as a way to understand racial identity interpretations. Next, I will look closer at the literature on racial identity in college. Finally, I will introduce the three schema being used by the respondents in this study and provide an overview of the dissertation.

Understanding Black Racial Identity

Before introducing my approach to studying racial identity and ideology, it is important to discuss how other scholars have studied these concepts. In doing so, I will present some selected pieces of literature, and demonstrate how they impact the present study. While there are some studies that focus on the varied ways in which black people make sense of being black, as I will present here, many of those studies focus on linking that variation to background characteristics. This brief review of some key sociological texts will establish what has been done and demonstrate where my work can contribute an updated frame fit for the present moment.

Sociologists studying black racial identity have often considered racial group classification, racial group identification, or racial group consciousness (Charles et al 2015). Studies of racial group classification often focus on who is defined as black, both by in group and out group members, including shifts in politics and migration patterns (Davis 2010). Racial group identification has been defined as "feelings of closeness to similar others in ideas, feelings, and thoughts" (Allen et al 1989). This focus has centered on who feels close to whom, and the social determinants of those feelings of closeness (Broman et al 1988). Studies of racial group consciousness often consider concepts such as racial solidarity and linked fate, or the idea that one's life chances are inextricably tied to the race as a whole (Dawson 1994). Narrowly defining racial identity as this commitment to linked fate, or any one particular ideology limits the analytical power of the concept and minimizes the variation in how people understand what it is to be black. This dissertation seeks to look at the ways in which a person can maintain a strong commitment to a black racial identity, but express what commitment means and should look like in a variety of ways.

Other lines of inquiry help us consider the intraracial variation that exists in sensemaking and the meaning individuals derive from their blackness. Sellers et al (1998) utilize a multidimensional model of black identity, which highlights four aspects of racial identity: Salience, Centrality, Regard, and Ideology. The authors define racial salience as the extent to which one's race is a relevant part of his/her self-concept at a specific moment in time. Centrality refers to the extent to which a person defines him or herself with regard to their race. Regard refers to an individual's affective and evaluative judgement of their race, while ideology is defined as the individual's beliefs, opinions, and attitudes on how black people should act. The authors' state: "The MMRI also emphasizes the individual's perception of what it means to be

Black. No a priori definition is provided. The MMRI recognizes that there are individual differences in the qualitative nature of the meaning individuals ascribe to being a member of the black racial group" (Sellers et al 1998: 23). This focus on the qualitative difference in sensemaking are useful in several ways. By breaking up the elements of black racial identity, we are able to understand how two individuals could at once have high racial salience, but vastly different racial ideologies. This allows us to consider the impact of each of these dimensions of racial identity on a myriad of outcomes, both in isolation and in concert with one another. Although this work was developed and popularized by psychologists, sociologists have also used this framework to identify differences in racial ideology.

Prudence Carter (2005) found variation in the ideological dimension of the racial and ethnic identities of her black and Latino respondents. In her study of New York city youth, she found three ideological profiles of students, cultural mainstreamers, noncompliant believers, and cultural straddlers. The mainstreamers emphasized the similarities between racial and ethnic minority groups and whites, and advocated for cultural assimilation while retaining a strong sense of racial centrality. These respondents believed in working within the system to advocate for social change. The noncompliant believers favored their own cultural presentations over the dominant white ones, and hope to succeed educationally without compromising on their performance of their racial and ethnic identity. The cultural straddlers bridge the gap between both of the other groups, moving across social and cultural spheres. These students comport themselves with the expected cultural behavior at school, they also retain their cultural identity at home and with peers.

Carter's work is instructive as it highlights the variation in racial ideology, specifically as it relates to cultural expression in schools. This provides key evidence against the "acting white"

hypothesis (Fordham and Ogbu 1986) as the respondents in her study believed in school and did not code school success as "acting white" but rather, were more concerned with cultural tastes such as music, dress, and language use as being "white", not achievement (Carter 2006; Carter 2005). Carter's ideological profiles are geared towards K-12 students and their attitudes towards school from students of varying levels of academic achievement. Her work is instructive for the present study as she demonstrates how different ideological profiles matter for how students navigate school. Carter's focus on K-12 students helps to see which ideological profiles are useful in academic success and making it to college. One may assume that as she demonstrates some ideological profiles are more rewarded by educational institutions than others, so there would be less variation in racial ideology amongst black college students. However, the students in my study have all matriculated to a selective university, yet variation in their understanding of their racial identity still exists.

The variation in black racial ideology has also been studied in adults. Elijah Anderson (1999) studied black executives and found distinct identity formations. The "core own" are those black employees who have what Anderson calls a "racially particularistic sense of identity." He says that these employees are more likely to have come from segregated black environments than the "periphery own." The peripheral own are from more integrated backgrounds and take a more humanistic approach to race relations. This group prides itself on its openness to new experiences and relationships outside of their black coworkers. Both groups are characterized by lower positions in the organizational structure and a belief in racial unity. The own see the work environment as largely confrontational and hostile, putting their faith in black coworkers over white ones. This study is instructive as it highlights the differences in how middle class individuals understand what it is to be black, and how those understandings matter for their life

at work. Anderson highlights the importance of the background characteristics for their racial identity, and does not leave room for considering how certain notions of identity are present across class backgrounds or in contexts outside of the workplace.

My work is positioned in a different point in the life course, after Carter's study and before Anderson's. Whereas both studies lean on social class as an explanation for ideological variation, I show how these differences in ideology can cut across class lines, through the adoption of cultural schemas. Like both studies, I engage with how black people navigate institutions and make sense of what it means to be black as they work towards social mobility.

In addition to these pieces, several other key studies elucidate the role of background characteristics, specifically place and ethnicity, in shaping differences in racial ideology. Lacy (2007) employs a tool-kit model of culture (Swidler 1986) to understand black middle class identity work. She finds that black middle class individuals draw from public, status based, racial, class based, and suburban identities to negotiate everyday life, guide their actions, and make sense of the actions of others. Place is very important for the racial identities of respondents in her study, as she finds that those in the upper middle class who live in majority white neighborhoods employ strategic assimilation and place their children in black social organizations to develop a black racial identity within their children, whereas those who live in majority black neighborhoods felt confident that their children would develop a healthy racial identity from living around other black people (Lacy 2004). While these findings indicate the importance of place and neighborhood as a site for constructing racial identity, it also illuminates variation in conceptions of black racial identity. For some, the goal is to buffer their children from racism by living and socializing among black people. For others, the goal is to prepare their children for the racism they deem as inevitable, by exposing them to white people from an early

age. Studies like this help unpack the content of individuals black racial identity and highlight the variation therein.

In addition to Lacy's work, other studies of place commonly look at the effect of neighborhood on racial identity development. For example, Erin Winkler (2012) argues that place — a combination of location and geography with the material environment, social character, and history, is key to the racial learning of adolescents as they take in messages of what it means to be black from all of these sources, a process she calls comprehensive racial learning. By focusing on a place specific understanding of black racial identity, we can understand how local context shapes nuanced black experiences, rather than broad tropes on what it means to be black that are not rooted in any landscape.

Other scholars investigate regional black experiences, such as Zandria Robinson's (2014) focus on Southern blackness and the unique ways in which a regional identity shapes black experience. Place also matters in terms of social isolation or integration, as those who are in more integrated environments are better able to articulate the ways in which race operates in America, and as such have different conceptions of what it means to be black, than those who live in the most isolated areas (Young 2004). Twine (1997) focuses on the suburban context for biracial black girls developing a white racial identity. She argues that due to their class status and location in racially segregated predominantly white communities, they have adopted racially neutral or 'white' racial identities. While these works help us see the importance of place to racial identity development, I argue that there are cultural schemas of racial identity available to people in all types of physical and social environments.

Ethnicity is also regularly studied as a major factor in how people come to understand what it means to be black. In Mary Waters (1999) seminal piece, she studies the racial and ethnic

identification of second-generation West Indian teenagers in New York City. She finds the youth typically identified in one of three ways: black American identities which downplayed their ethnic identities and placed emphasis on the way that race shaped their life chances; ethnic identities which distance themselves from black Americans; and immigrant identities which were mostly newer immigrants who were not very concerned with choosing between a racial and ethnic identity. Waters also focuses on the way in which social class tracks with these identity choices, with ethnic identified youth coming from more middle class backgrounds, and black American identified youth coming from lower-income households. This piece is instructive as it looks at how ethnicity can matter for the attachment people feel to their racial identity and the way in which it matters for how they navigate school and work. More recent works have found that African immigrant communities are simultaneously holding strong African identities and black identities (Sall 2019, Imoagene 2017).

My study is not positioned to investigate all the nuances of ethno-racial identity. However, as approximately one-third of my sample is a first or second generation immigrant, it is important to consider the ways in which the presence of an immigrant identity might shape their attachment to a black racial identity. As I will discuss later in this chapter, West Indian and African immigrants are overrepresented in higher education, and ethnicity is often used as a key way to explain the (lack of) closeness in a black campus community. I will demonstrate in this work how people of all ethnic backgrounds have access to varying cultural schemas of racial identity.

As I have presented here, work has been done to investigate the variation in how black people make sense of their race. However, much of that work relies heavily on background characteristics to explain the variation. While these more structural factors are important for

shaping one's lived experience, it is important to consider the ways in which racial ideology can be patterned outside of these factors.

The Case for Schemas of Racial Identity

While focusing on the impact of background characteristics on racial identity is important, there is value in considering the ways in which understandings of racial identity are available to individuals across backgrounds. Cultural schemas allow us to do that. Sociologists of culture and cognition have used schemas to discuss the ways in which individuals make sense of themselves and society, and how perceptions are organized (Wood et al 2018). Categorization is in many ways the basis of shared culture, as the placing things in categories gives us a shorthand to understand information, and the ability to quickly process new information by relating it to that which we have previously encountered (Rosch 1978).

While the concept of schemas has been employed by anthropologists and psychologists among others, William Sewell (1992) popularized the term for sociologists in his landmark piece "A Theory of Structure: Duality, Agency, and Transformation." In it, he argues that structure is "composed of mutually sustaining schemas and sets of resources that empower and constrain social action and tend to be reproduced by that action." Sewell posits that schemas work in tandem with resources, constituting the structures that govern our social worlds. Schemas help us explain and use the resources by giving them meaning. Cultural schemas can be defined as "ordered, socially constructed, and taken-for-granted frameworks for understanding and evaluating self and society, for thinking and acting" (Blair-Loy 2001). Cultural schemas provide conceivable ways to live one's life, delineate moral boundaries, influence the desirability of various possibilities, and in doing so, help shape dispositions and guide action (Dean et al 2013). These schema do not dictate or determine action, but rather serve as template or cultural model

wherein experiences can be anticipated, interpreted and evaluated in light of it (Holland and Eisenhart 1990).

There are several aspects of cultural schemas that make them apt to understanding the complex nature of black racial identity. Namely, schemas are transposable, shared, publicly available, and taken-for-granted. Sewell (1992, p. 17) discusses the transposability of schemas when he says that schemas can be applied to "a wide and not fully predictable range of cases outside the context in which they are initially learned." These schemas are not fixed to a particular situation or point in time, rather they can be used to understand and explain situations outside of their original context. Racial identity schemas help individuals make sense of multiple aspects of their lives as they navigate their social worlds. Enriquez and Saguy (2016) provide an example of the transposability of schemas in their study of undocumented immigrant youth movements. The youth in their study repurposed the language of "coming out" from the realm of sexuality to their immigration status as they organized around undocumented immigrant rights. In the case of black racial identity, these respondents are taking cultural schema they have learned in one context, and applying them to the new setting of higher education. In the case of this study, respondents are interpreting language from the Civil Rights movement and historical struggles for black liberation and applying them to their encounters in classrooms.

The shared nature of socially constructed schema make them apt for discussing racial identity. While identity is at once both a deeply personal and individual concept, it is also about shared meanings and group-level belonging. In some ways, the contradictory use of the concept of identity makes it difficult to gain analytical purchase (Brubaker and Cooper 2000). While individual understanding and expression of their racial identity is deeply personal, it is not

entirely unique. Rather, these publicly available, socially constructed schemas provide individuals with templates of how to make sense of themselves and the world around them. As Patterson (2014) argues, if it is not shared and public, it is not cultural. Therefore, in order to retain the sociological relevance of identity, it is key to consider the ways in which the meanings that individuals hold are both shared and public. Schemas allow us to do that.

These schemas are socially constructed in that they vary across time, vary across space and place, and are made real by people's interactions with them. Schemas do not appear out of thin air, or solely in the minds of individuals, but rather are created as social actors who are responding to their structural conditions. According to Ridgeway (2006), schemas are created as a result of the similar material constraints placed on actors. As a result of these conditions, they develop similar schemas to interpret and guide their experience. Then, in micro-level interactions between these social actors, schemas are diffused across social networks. As individuals draw from, interpret, and use schemas, they contribute to them as viable interpretations of black racial identity. Omi and Winant (1986) define a racial project as an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial dynamics, and an effort to reorganize and redistribute resources along particular racial lines. Whether it is the "black is beautiful" and black power movement, the idea of a post-racial society, the black lives matter movement, or other micro or macro racial projects individuals can draw from these as they make sense of what it means to be black. In their interactions with one another, they then affirm and spread these interpretations.

Another key feature of schemas is their taken-for-granted nature. As schemas are developed by societies over time, they become naturalized and therefore unquestioned (Blair Loy 2003). These schemas are taken for granted in the sense that individuals do not necessarily think about them or actively choose among them as they make decisions and move through the world.

Sewell (1992) argues that schemas vary in their level of public consciousness, in that deep schemas are taken for granted and applied by individuals without being aware that they are applying them. Individuals are aware of other interpretations of racial identity and often refer to them offhand, however they are not explicitly discussing the times at which they choose a schema or move between them.

Schemas are an appropriate way to think about racial identity because cultural schemas guide and shape action. In her landmark work, *Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies,* Ann Swidler (1986:283) argues "publicly available meanings facilitate certain patterns of action, making them readily available, while discouraging others." Swidler pushes us away from thinking about culture in terms of values, but rather as a set of resources that people can draw upon to help them interpret the world around them and decide upon possible courses of action. In this line of thinking, schemas are these "publicly available meanings" and through their presence help individuals conceive of what is possible, interpret these possibilities and act on them. In this conception of racial identity and ideology, I am considering the ways in which individuals' understanding of their race and the meaning they derive from it guides their action. In taking a cultural schemas approach to racial identity, we can better understand the link between meaning making and action.

Schemas also have strong moral and emotional commitments (Blair Loy 2003). Individuals' commitment to schemas help them to make sense of not only what is possible, but also what is right and what is desirable. These emotional commitments can entail the development and deployment of moral boundaries—-which are a type of symbolic boundaries that are drawn on the basis of moral character and centered around subjective judgments of qualities of honesty, work ethic, integrity, etc. (Lamont 1992). In this case, the moral boundaries

black students are drawing are centered on their assessment of character traits they value, admire, and deem as making an acceptable and favorable black person. Often studies of race and boundary work have investigated interracial boundaries and constitution of identity by looking at the lines drawn between ethnic groups (Lamont and Molnar 2002). However, this study is focused on the intraracial boundary work conducted along moral lines, as students draw from cultural schemas and by evaluating the behavior of their peers, determine for themselves what a good black person looks like.

For these reasons, cultural schemas are a useful analytical tool for conceptualizing and understanding black racial identity. In using a cultural schemas model, we can take stock of the rich variation in black identity, looking specifically at how individuals draw upon these publicly available shared cultural models to interpret themselves and society. Through understanding the cultural schemas used and the social relational context, we can understand the reproduction and changes in larger structural patterns (Ridgeway 2006). According to Blair-Loy (2001:705) "cultural change often occurs as the outcome of a struggle between different ideologies, different models of a worthwhile and desirable life, enacted in the lives of people responding to social structural change." In understanding how individuals use schemas to interpret their surroundings, we can trace larger social changes in conceptions of race and identity.

Black Racial Identity in College

Understanding the black racial identity development of college students is crucial for concerns of social mobility, the development of the black middle class, and the future directions of conceptions of race. These students, enrolled in an elite university, are poised to be the next generation of the black middle class, and as such are more likely to interact with non-black people in their work and social lives. They also are likely to take on high prestige occupations

and serve in leadership roles in their communities. By understanding how they are thinking about their race at this crucial emerging adulthood stage of development, we can get a better idea of possible future patterns for black middle class adults and families.

Looking at higher education as an incubator developing young adults (Stevens et al 2008) allows us to consider how the structure of the university matters for the ways in which students learn about and develop their racial identities. As Armstrong and Hamilton (2013) demonstrate, the relationship between an individual's background characteristics and the institutional pathways created by the university shapes the college experience of students, and also matters greatly for their mobility trajectories. As discussed, schemas are developed through structural conditions placing similar material constraints on individuals (Ridgeway 2006). As students within the same university, the school's organization determines many of the structural conditions under which the students exist. From the structure of the admission procedures, pre-college programs, residential learning programs, course requirements, etc., the university setting provides the material terms that these cultural schema will help students interpret. Through their interactions with one another, schema around being a black college student will diffuse and spread throughout the population.

In this particular university, black students are in the racial minority, constituting only 4% of their freshman class. In Cech et al's (2018) study of STEM faculty, they found that cultural schemas of inequality—-namely meritocratic and structural schema—-mattered for how individuals perceived the climate of their work environment. The authors concluded that individuals' perception of the chilliness of their work climate is more than the sum of their personal experiences, but also their adherence to a cultural schema. The authors found that those who adhered to a meritocratic schema, and as such believed that the under-representation of

women and people of color in STEM fields was the result of meritocratic processes, were less likely to recognize a chilly work environment (Cech et al 2016). This finding suggests that schema can help us understand how people explain and respond to the condition of being a racial minority on a college campus. These students are responding to being in the racial minority in different ways, not just because of their personal experiences, such as where they went to high school or who they were friends with growing up, but rather in part because of which cultural schema of black identity they draw from. These schema help them explain and understand themselves and society and serve as prescriptive for how they should act in this new setting of college.

Black racial identity also matters for how students connect to the university and each other. Studies of black students in selective institutions often highlight the negative experiences, including feeling only marginally connected to the university, as well as dealing with feelings of isolation and loneliness (Feagin et al 1996; Willie 2003). However, the population of black students in elite colleges are quite diverse in terms of social class, ethnicity, and racial makeup. In the National Longitudinal Survey of Freshman, black students on elite college campuses were just as likely to be from inner-city highly segregated environments as they were to be from suburban integrated environments (Massey et al 2003). In the same study the representation of first and second generation black immigrants on the 28 campuses was twice the size of the representation of black immigrants in the national college aged population (Massey et al 2007). This study also revealed that at the time of this study 4% of blacks identify as multiracial nationwide and 17% of students attending selective schools identified as multiracial (Charles et al 2009). This racial diversity on elite college campuses has only increased in the 15 years between the incoming freshman class of the NLSF and when the students in this study stepped

on campus. This heightened intraracial diversity means that black students are being challenged on what it means to be black not just from outsiders, but also from each other, as their more narrow conceptions of the class origins, ethnicity and nationality, and racial makeup of black students is likely to be upended by a college campus whose black population is more diverse than the black population at large.

Scholars looking at black college students have often looked to this intraracial diversity to explain differences in college experience among this population. Research demonstrates that first generation and low-income college students might experience a culture shock of sorts as their own cultural background did not provide them with taken for granted tools that are necessary to succeed in higher education, with this disconnect being felt more harshly by racial minorities **(**Lee and Kramer 2013; Torres 2009**)**. However, Jack (2014) demonstrates that within the black poor attending elite universities, much diversity exists. He calls the students who have crossed social boundaries in their pre-college schools, namely through government programs, diversity initiatives at private schools, or independent agencies, the "Privileged Poor." Those students who had more localized schooling experiences in neighborhood schools with less racial and class diversity, Jack terms the "Doubly Disadvantaged." Jack found that the pre-college experiences of the students had great impact on the way in which they interacted with the faculty/staff and institutional resources, how they dealt with black students from different class backgrounds, and how they dealt with the white students at their institution.

Smith and Moore (2000) found that black students feel varying degrees of closeness to the black community dependent on their family background, with multi-racial students, those who grew up in predominantly white areas, and those from the lowest socio-economic contexts feeling the least connected to the campus black community. Torres and Massey (2012) also find

that pre college segregation matters greatly for how prepared students feel both socially and academically when they enter campus. In their interviews with black students at a highly selective school, they found that those who came to the university from racially integrated backgrounds were anticipating being isolated by the black community and having their racial authenticity called into question. Those who were coming to campus from highly segregated all-black environments were looking to find black peer groups on campus to embrace them.

Among the previous generation of black college students, Willie (2003) found something similar. In her study of black adults who graduated from Howard University and Northwestern University in the 1970s and 1980s, Willie found that pre-college exposure to segregated and integrated environments shaped expectations around the campus racial climate and one's expectations of what it meant to be "really black." The present study builds on these previous works by examining variation in how black college students make sense of the black community on campus, yet by using cultural schemas as a framework, I can look at how experiences of marginality within the black community cut across pre-college experiences.

Previous research has indicated that black college students might frame their closeness to the black community as a result of their social class and pre-college experiences (Twine 1997; Smith and Moore 2000; Torres and Massey 2012; Charles et al 2009). Due to residential segregation, low-income black college students who spent more time in all black neighborhoods are found to experience more social stress in college (Torres and Charles 2004) and have a harder time adjusting to college (Torres 2009) and finding a place within the black campus community (Torres and Massey 2012; Smith and Moore 2002). Torres and Massey (2012) found that black students from integrated environments found themselves having trouble relating to the black community on campus as a result of not being familiar with urban black culture. Studies

like these highlight the intraracial diversity of black demographics on campus as an explanation for the difficult social experience faced by black students. In addition to being a racial minority, the black students on campus come from such diverse backgrounds that they are not able to find community even in those who look like them. The present study complicates those findings, by demonstrating that it is not just a diversity in pre-college experiences that shapes students attachment to the black community, but also a diversity in racial sensemaking. The cultural schemas of racial identity help black students understand their minoritized position on campus and guide the actions they take in response.

In addition to their effects on closeness to campus black community, scholars have used this diversity in pre-college experiences to try and explain differences in black racial ideology. Using data from the NLSF, Camille Charles and colleagues (2015) investigated how black student racial identity is related to students' ethnicity, nativity, socioeconomic, and contextual experiences in childhood. The authors found that students from the poorest and most segregated pre-college environments were most likely to espouse nationalist ideology. This work is important as it highlights the diversity of the black student experience, and signals which background characteristics might be important to further explore. However, this study was based on students who entered college almost twenty years ago. As such, one might argue that students opportunity to learn about their racial identity was more limited to their local context, without the influence of the internet and social media shaping students ability to learn what it is to be black from sources outside their locale. Additionally, this work was conducted before symbolically and substantively important moments in black history, such as the election of President Barack Obama.

Meanwhile, the students in the present study were in middle school during the first election of President Barack Obama, and were in their second year of college when Donald Trump was elected President of the United States. This has created a wildly different historical moment for these students to come of age, and therefore it is reasonable that as their structural and material conditions are different than those who came before them, the way in which they process their place in society, that is, the schemas they use, would also be different.

The previous work in this field is instructive as it highlights how black students are experiencing college, focusing on how their background characteristics matter for the way they move through their university. This present study will contribute to and complicate these studies, by adding the layer of cultural schemas as an explanation for variation in student experience.

Implications of Black Racial Identity in College

Understanding the variation of racial identity in black college students is also important for students educational and professional trajectory. As Armstrong and Hamilton (2013) demonstrate, universities are organized into pathways, which are designed to help students meet their social and academic goals. As students make sense of what it means to be black on campus, they open themselves to some pathways, and close off the possibility of others.

College completion in the United States is highly stratified by race and class, with whites and those from higher social class backgrounds being more likely to complete their Bachelor's degree (Ciocca and DiPrete 2018). According to the Department of Education, 63 percent of white students earn a Bachelor's degree in 6 years compared to 41 percent of black students (Snyder, de Bray and Dillow 2016). How students understand their racial identity has been linked to educational outcomes in several ways. Charles et al (2009) found that for black students in elite universities, social engagement in college was more important than GPA for predicting

student persistence and matriculation. As Warikoo and Carter (2009) suggest in their review of the race and educational achievement literature, sociologists of education must consider race as not just a variable used to explain educational outcomes, but also as a formative identity that is produced by complex social processes. Studies of black achievement in higher education that do not account for how individuals themselves make sense of being black run the risk of essentializing race and giving the construct undo power. What one black student understands as discrimination and may discourage them from completing their studies, another may not interpret as such. The variation in interpretation of the same social structure is key to understanding the experiences and outcomes of black students.

Black racial identity also matters for how students conceive of their potential career paths. In this dissertation I investigate how students use these cultural schemas to make sense of college majors and their intended careers. Understanding how college students consider their career paths is important for the future development and stability of the black middle class. A recent study from the Center on Education and the Workforce at Georgetown University (Carnevale et al 2016) found that black college students are more likely to pursue majors that lead to low-paying jobs. The repercussions of this include future debt and underemployment. If black students, even those who are attending highly selective universities are choosing career paths with less earning potential, they are not reaping the full economic benefits of their degrees. This could have long-term consequences for racial income inequality and the racial wealth gap. The black middle class remains with less income and advantage than its white counterpart (Landry and Marsh 2011; Pattillo-McCoy 1999; Oliver and Shapiro 1995; Landry 1987), and the increasing costs of higher education are poised to continue to exacerbate these inequalities. College-going black students are taking on more debt (Cunningham and Santiago

2008; Houle 2014) to earn degrees and are more likely to default on loans (Houle 2014) than white students. According to Houle and Warner (2017) among college graduates with student loan debt, blacks are more likely than whites to return home after college. This may place an undue burden on already precarious black family financial situations. Therefore, understanding how and why black students enter college majors, and how they make sense of what is important in a potential career is incredibly important.

One explanation for black students ending up in lower paying jobs is that they are being pushed out of high paying career paths. Those push out factors may include the perceived discrimination by faculty and classmates in the classroom and unwelcoming racial climates (Allen 1992; Strayhorn 2018). Other pushout factors include the stereotype threat, or a lack of academic preparedness. Another explanation is that black students are drawn to more service oriented majors because of their commitment to black people and black issues. As indicated by the concept of "linked fate" (Dawson 1994) black Americans have demonstrated longstanding belief in a common destiny and that what happens to one black person matters for the group as a whole. This has been considered as an explanation for black students entering racialized careers. Collins (1997) defines racialized jobs as those that have an actual and/or symbolic connection to black communities, black issues, or civil rights. Collins used this framework to evaluate jobs within government agencies, but the framework has been extended to work aimed at improving the lives of black people across sectors (Beasley 2011). In her study of black and white students career choices, Maya Beasley (2011) found that black students more deeply embedded in the campus black community pursued racialized jobs—those jobs that have an actual or symbolic connection to black issues.

As Beasley demonstrates, some black students in elite institutions may feel pressure to choose helping careers or those that have the possibility to give back to the black community. Still others might see the best way of helping other black people as to make absolutely as much money as possible, or to have a job that serves as inspiration for others in the community. Other students may not feel any such pressure and choose whatever career path they so desire. While Beasley hints at this variation in racial identity, she does not systematically analyze patterns in the meaning students derive from their blackness and its relationship on career trajectory. This study seeks to do just that. By looking at how cultural schemas shape ideas about career paths and college majors, we can get a sense for which students are positioned to enter careers that may have a lower return on economic investment but a higher impact to the black community. If we understand how racial identity matters for how black students are making sense of career opportunities, we can better support students in finding the path that is right for them.

Racial Identity and Campus Involvement

Racial identity matters for career choice not just in how students think of careers as desirable, but also in how they engage with campus wide organizations, career pathways, recruitment events, etc. As Binder et al (2016) find in their study of students at Harvard and Stanford, students at elite colleges enter knowing very little about the elite career options available to them in fields such as consulting and finance, yet through exposure to campus recruiting events and professional organizations, students are made aware of high-status jobs. However, access to these pathways to elite job opportunities are not open to everyone, both by the structure of the university (Armstrong and Hamilton 2013) and through the choices and priorities of students themselves.

Some black students may feel it necessary to spend all their time in black cultural activities in order to affirm their presence on campus, and therefore not have as much time for professional organizations and activities that may better position them for job opportunities. Still others may find that time spent in black professional organizations is worthwhile as it serves as a specialized recruiting site, regardless of their own personal commitment to their black racial identity. Understanding the variation in black racial identity positions us to better consider not only which pathways are open to black students, but how students themselves interpret and evaluate the presence of such pathways.

Campus involvement has been studied by sociologists of higher education, as being involved in the campus community has been linked to better student outcomes and achievement (Charles et al 2009)**.** For black students, this involvement has been investigated in terms of how well black students are incorporated into the larger campus community, as well as their involvement in racial affinity groups and other ethnically oriented student organizations. For some, the presence of ethnic organizations, such as the Black Student Union, black cultural clubs, and black professional organizations, signals segregation that can foster negative feelings towards the university and racial intolerance (Sidanius et al 2008; D'Souza 1991) or that the presence of these organizations serve as a barrier to true integration (Pettigrew 1998).

However, these groups are also thought to be beneficial for the development and school experience for black students. Black student organizations can provide support necessary social and academic support to navigate hostile campus racial climates (Willie 2003; Charles et al 2009; Hurtado et al 1998). Black students can find ways to build community and learn more about their racial and ethnic identity in these organizations. These organizations also prove to be key parts of their social networks and provide important social outlets for these students.

Additionally, due to residential and occupational segregation, black college students often enter college not being able to provide each other with vital information on the full scope of occupational opportunities and pathways open to them (Beasley 2011). Therefore, on campus organizations become increasingly important, both with black and non-black peers, as a way to fill gaps that white students are able to fill informally.

Not all black students are able to receive the benefits of these black campus organizations. The intraracial diversity of the black campus community leads to some black students feeling alienated from the larger black community on campus (Smith and Moore 2002; Smith and Moore 2000; Willie 2003). These studies found that low-income, immigrant, and biracial blacks felt less close to the black community as other people. However, what I find is complicating these conclusions. It is not these demographic and pre-college experiences that are dictating people belonging to black affinity groups, but that the schemas they use and the way in which they understand what it is to be black that is mattering most for how they approach black campus organizations. In this dissertation, I will describe how the respondents understanding of their racial identity shapes their interactions with campus organizations, both those geared specifically to black students and not.

In addition to formal student organizations, peer networks and friendships matter greatly for learning about campus resources, potential career opportunities, the development of social capital, and overall student satisfaction. Scholars have identified that for the most part, college students social networks remain largely racially segregated (Charles et al 2009; Espenshade and Radford 2009). Racial identity matters for how students make sense of the school environment. Johnson (2019) identifies integration, marginalized segregation, and social adaptation as three cultural strategies black and brown engineering students use to navigate their academic and

social lives. He links these strategies to students pre-college experiences, finding that students who attended integrated high schools are better able to integrate into a university's academic peer networks and be fully integrated into the campus community. While this finding helps to highlight the variation in how students of color make sense of and navigate their minoritized status on campus, the sole focus on pre-college experiences ignores the importance of variation in cultural schemas and the development of racial identity from sources outside of one's school, neighborhood, or family.

By looking at how students frame their intended career paths and campus involvement, we can see these cultural schemas in action. This helps us understand why these cultural schemas matter as they have real implications for the actions students take in college and the way they experience the university. While I can not speak to the outcomes of these students, understanding their trajectory is an important contribution of this work. Trajectory matters for the long-term growth and stability of the black middle class, as I am concerned with how the students experience college and strategize for their futures. Students racial ideologies are shaping how they experience college and as such are shaping the personal, professional, and social benefits they receive for college.

Taking a cultural schema approach to black racial identity in college allows us to consider this intraracial diversity in college, and to do so in a way that is based on more than just differences in pre-college background factors. As schemas are the cultural component of social structure (Sewell 1992), they allow us to trace the shifts in culture that are tied to specific historical moments. This is not to say that background characteristics do not matter for the adoption of cultural schemas. Instead, I argue that background characteristics, namely gender, ethnicity, and pre-college experiences of integration matter more for *how* the schema are adopted

and enacted, than *which* schema is adopted. This means that students from a variety of pre-college experiences might choose a particular schema, but their reasons for adhering to it may differ. No one schema is entirely the domain of one social class, ethnic background, or any other demographic factor. Yet, within a particular schema, these factors might matter for how that schema is expressed. Using a cultural schema framework is one step towards strengthening a sociology of identity that can better speak to the patterned ways in which identity varies.

Commanders, Ambassadors, and Conscientious Objectors

The respondents in this study can be characterized as using three cultural schemas to make sense of their racial identity. I have named these three ideal types, Commanders, Ambassadors, and Conscientious Objectors. The term ideal type means that these groupings are abstract and general, and helps me construct an analytical framework wherein the individuals have more in common in their racial sensemaking with those in the group than those in other groups. These constructions help me emphasize the schema's defining characteristics. The schemas get their names from the way in which students interpret college as a site of racial contestation. See Table 1.1 for an outline of the main tenets of the schema as ideal types.

For the Commanders, college is a battlefield, a site of war in which the only way to win is to band together with fellow black students, and attack matters of racism head on when they see them. For this group, a good black person is one who supports other black people, and they place value on authenticity, often discussing a "real" black person as one who spends time with other black people. These respondents draw distinctions between themselves and those who do not speak to black people on campus or do not support other black people. The commanders are not afraid to confront racism when they see it, as they interpret racism as being built in to the fabric of American life. Their commitment to other black people and building community amongst

black students provides them with a strong sense of support, but also closes them off from potential relationships with white peers and classmates as well as black students who they deem not to be authentically black. These students do receive some battle scars from their constant engaging in war, namely in the mental toll that comes from always feeling compelled to fight, and the social stigma attached to being perceived of as "angry."

For Ambassadors, college is a diplomatic mission, in which they are striving to be excellent to present a positive representation of black life. If they are excellent enough, they can serve as an example and role model to other black people of what is possible, and also defy negative racial stereotypes. This group believes that racism is mostly about individual perceptions, and through their individual pursuits, they can help bring about a more equitable society. They draw moral distinctions between themselves and those who they believe are not open or willing to engage across racial lines. These students role as diplomats allows them to extend themselves to those who are different from them and benefit from relationships outside of their traditional social circles. They can have meaningful relationships with other black students as well as attempt to make those in the white world. Even when they are not successful in doing so, they are able to see themselves positively for their attempts. However, by interpreting college as a diplomatic mission, these students feel a pressure to be perfect, to always represent themselves and their community in a way that will advance the standing of black Americans.

For Conscientious Objectors, college is a site of protest for a racial battle they know is happening around them. These students are aware that others are experiencing college in a way that is dictated by race, but these students feel like to do so would be illogical. They pride themselves on their ability to "see people as people" and make relationships based on common interests and not race. These respondents espouse a color-blind ideology and feel that society

would be better off if more people eschewed our present day racial classification system. In objecting to the racial battle that is being waged, these students have more time to follow interests and pursuits that are not defined by race. However, as they sit on the sidelines, they are also aware that meaningful social connections and relationships are being forged without them as they feel isolated from other black students.

In this dissertation, I will expound on these three ideal types, solidifying my case that schemas give us a meaningful way to understand black racial identity, while also making an argument about the relative strengths of each interpretation of what it means to be black. These students are engaging with one another and students from many other races within the walls of their campus. In this time, as students are learning who they are and what it means to be black in the world, they are drawing intra-racial and interracial boundaries. The use of a particular schema has consequences for the social and academic lives of these students.

This dissertation contributes to the literature in several key ways. As a study of racial identity development, using a cultural schemas framework allows me to systematically categorize different conceptions of racial identity. This extends previous work which acknowledges variation in how individuals make sense of and experience their blackness, by naming and defining the groups. The typology presented here can be extended and applied to a variety of settings, and is not limited to higher education. As a case study of how individuals make sense of and navigate one mobility enhancing institution, there is room to imagine how these schemas show up and operate in other sites.

The present work also provides a look at racial identity formation in college at a new historical moment. The students in this study are part of the third generation post-civil rights, and attend college at a University that has been forced to stop considering race in admissions based

on the passing of a statewide constitutional amendment. These students have had access to the Internet throughout their entire lives, and have had social media accounts since they were in middle school. The students in this study entered college having experienced 7 years of a black man's presidency, and many of them, in their first time voting for President of the United States, cast their vote for a woman. These, and other factors, have created the conditions in which these students live and learn about themselves and their place in the world. This dissertation seeks to contribute a framework of racial identity that is agile enough to meet the historical moment and capture how students of today learn about race. A framework that can move beyond the bounds of physical space and class backgrounds, to leave room for how students today live their lives, which is meaningfully impacted by shared publicly available, online spaces.

Organization of the Dissertation

In Chapter 2 I introduce the methods by which I conducted this study including a description of my interview protocols, the selection of the site, recruitment of the respondents, and a discussion of my role as a researcher. Chapter 3 delineates the ideal type or abstract model of the Commanders in more detail. Chapter 4 shows how the Commanders navigate the university setting. In this chapter I demonstrate that the Commanders collectivist stance both opens them up to strong relationships with black students who they deem as "down for the cause," and due to the value they place on authenticity, closes them off to other potentially meaning relationships with non-black students or black students who interpret their racial identity differently. Chapter 5 focuses on the self-concept, meaning, and views on race relations of the Ambassadors. In Chapter 6, I look at the Ambassadors on campus, and I argue that their use of this schema gives them a strong sense of agency, but also constrains them as they strive to be perfect representations of black people. Chapter 7 showcases the Conscientious Objectors as

they aim to be logical people who eschew confinement into racial categories. Chapter 8 looks at how the Conscientious Objectors use that schema to navigate college. Finally, I provide some concluding comments, focusing specifically on how these findings matter for the way in which students experience college and what it means for our understanding of black racial identity.

Table 1.1 Description of three cultural schemas of racial identity

	Commanders	**Ambassadors**	**Conscientious Objectors**
Self-Concept	Being black is the most important part of myself.	Being black is one part of myself, that I hope to redefine through my unique personal qualities.	I acknowledge that I'm black, but I don't think about it.
Meaning	To be black is to be excellent, and is something I can draw from in difficult times.	I feel pressure to try to be excellent to change negative stereotypes.	Being black does not matter for my everyday life, but provides some social benefits.
Ideology	Black people should support one another and be color-conscious.	Black people should be in integrated spaces, being a good example.	We should be colorblind and not let race dictate the way we see people.
Moral Boundaries	A good black person should speak to other black people when they see them.	A good black person is one who is willing to be friends with white people and not isolate themselves.	A good person is one who is smart enough to see that race is illogical
Racism	Is inherent in American society and largely structural in nature.	Is declining, and is mostly interpersonal. Black people carrying themselves well in public will help end racism.	Still exists, but is declining and is often overblown by black people.
Regard	Black people are inherently excellent, it is society that has devalued black people.	Black people need to address their mindset and be more open to other cultures and other people in order to progress.	Black people's behavior often justifies the negative treatment they receive by society.

CHAPTER II.
Methods and Data

In this chapter, I detail the process by which I chose my site, gathered my study participants, collected my data, and conceptualized the three ideal types presented here. I will also discuss my relationship to the field and introduce the three groups.

Study Design

Description of Study Site

All interviews were conducted on the campus of a selective Midwestern public university. Following the lead of Armstrong and Hamilton (2013), Jack (2019) and others, I have chosen not to reveal the name of the university, because this is not simply the story of students attending this one university, and should not be read as such. Instead, this is a story of black people learning to navigate an institution. There are ways in which the findings on these pages can be applied to a variety of settings, wherein black people are making sense of how their identity matters for a particular space. This is not to say that the particularities of this university are immaterial to the analysis. In many ways, the university demographics, location, policies, and organizational structure set the structural conditions that the respondents are using their cultural schema to interpret. However, I am confident that the schema presented herein are present at other universities and institutional settings. As I will demonstrate in the analysis, the students have access to this shared cultural material through the online spaces they inhabit, the content of their courses, and through the current state of political and social discourse. This material is

available in other places for other people navigating similar institutions. Therefore this is the story of how college students at one university make sense of what it means to be black, but the conditions that they experience are common across many universities, and lead to students grappling with similar issues, and turning to similar publicly available, shared, taken for granted schemas to interpret their experience.

The university is a large, public university with approximately 30,000 undergraduate students. The entering freshman class for the students in this study was 3.1% black. The university has repeatedly been listed as a top public university (U.S. News and World Report 2019). In 2014, the university's black students launched a twitter campaign detailing their experiences of marginality on campus. This campaign went viral and received nationwide coverage. None of the respondents in this study were on campus at the time of the twitter campaign, but most were aware of the campaign and mentioned it in their interviews, either as a point of comparison for their own experiences on campus, a marker of how things had progressed since then, or as something they considered before making the decision to attend the university. In 2015, the school began a university-wide diversity, equity, and inclusion strategic planning process. This process also showed up in the interviews as respondents discussed their frustration with the progress they were seeing as a result of the plan or their own involvement in its creation and implementation.

This university was selected as a site of study for both theoretical and practical reasons. Theoretically, this university is ideal for the study as based on its selectivity rating, can be considered an elite institution (US News and World Report). Elite institutions might be in the best position to help students achieve upward mobility, as they their large recruiting reach allows them to select the most talented students from disadvantaged racial and ethnic groups and

economic backgrounds (Espenshade and Radford 2009). According to Carnevale and Strohl (2013) while overall enrollment in college has grown for blacks in America, between 1995 and 2009 only 9% of black new attendees are attending the 468 most selective schools, as compared to 82% of their white counterparts. The returns for college generally, and for more elite schools is hotly contested and thoroughly investigated in the literature. This much is clear: having a college degree matters economically and socially for black students, providing on average higher incomes, access to elite jobs, and expanded social networks (Brand and Xie 2010; Eide et al 1998; Espenshade and Radford 2009). Therefore, choosing a site wherein black students potentially stand the most to gain, while also being increasingly in the minority, provides an interesting analytical setup.

While being an elite school, the university is also a flagship public research university. As Armstrong and Hamilton (2013) argue, public research universities bridge the elite and mass sectors of higher education. With highly regarded faculty and large endowments, coupled with taxpayer dollars and a commitment to the state, elite public universities like this one are designed to provide a high quality education to students at an affordable price for in-state students. As such, the institution brings together in and out of state students from a variety of class backgrounds.

This university in particular is an ideal theoretical site as it has been included in other landmark studies of college student experience. As one of the 28 National Longitudinal Survey of Freshman (NLSF) universities, student experiences from this university are documented and analyzed in Massey et al's (2003) *The Source of the River*, Charles et al's (2009) *Taming the River*, and several other articles which use this dataset. My dissertation is in conversation with these works in many ways. My interviews were conducted 15 years after the conclusion of the

NLSF. My work builds on the previous studies with a specific focus on how the variation in racial ideology matters for college student experience.

One might assume that to study the racial identity of black college students, an HBCU would make for a natural site. I believe strongly in the value of HBCUs, both as institutions and as sites of identity development, but HBCU students are outside of the scope of this particular study. To understand the full range of black identity among college students, we would need evidence from those who attended schools all along the spectrum of black enrollment. The students in this study chose to attend a university with a low percentage of black students, and still much ideological diversity exists. Future work can and should look to see how these schema operate at schools with different proportions of black student populations.

Practically, I selected this site because I had ties to this school which allowed me to conduct my research efficiently, as well as be familiar with the campus culture, relevant events on campus, and be a part of the community in meaningful ways. Locating my study within one site allowed me to observe responses to campus and national events that happened over the course of my study period. In the time of my interviews, videos of several black people killed by police went viral. My interviews also occurred during the run up to and aftermath of the 2016 Presidential election. Also, during the course of my data collection period, several incidents of campus racism occurred. I incorporated these events into my interview protocol, and they also came up during informal conversations that occurred before and after interviews. Students were grappling with these events personally, and also were responding to the way in which the university and their classmates were dealing with them. These key moments became invaluable for the work itself.

Sample Recruitment

From October 2015 to April 2017 I completed 41 interviews with 26 black college students. Each student was interviewed in their freshman year, and 15 students completed follow-up interviews in their sophomore year. All students were between the ages of 17 and 20 at the time of the interviews.

In order to recruit participants for my study, I used the Registrar's office to send a targeted email to all students in the freshman class who self-identified as black or African American. This email was sent to a total of 117 individuals. Some black students in the class had opted out of receiving such emails. Sending my initial email to all students in my targeted demographic allowed me to reach students who have not self-selected into participating in black student organizations. I made initial contact with 18 of my respondents based on their replies to my mass email. I also posted fliers around campus announcing my study and sent my email to listservs of organizations that target black freshman students. I also engaged in snowball sampling and asked my respondents for suggestions of students I should contact to interview. Two students volunteered to put my information in a group message thread for black college freshmen at the university. These multiple points of contact yielded the rest of my interviews. Each of the last 8 interviews scheduled told me they had heard about my study at least twice before reaching out to participate.

Recruiting respondents and scheduling interviews turned out to be more difficult than I originally expected. I sent my initial email through the registrar in October 2015. I sent a second email in March 2016 hoping to recruit more respondents. Over the course of my recruitment period I was in contact with at least 63 students. However, many of those students stopped responding at some point between their initial response to one of my emails and showing up for an interview. 23 students did not fill out the pre-screening interview questionnaire I sent them.

Other students stopped communicating as I was trying to schedule a time and place for the actual interview. I followed up with each student I originally contacted and was eventually able to complete 26 interviews with students in their freshman year.

Two features of this research design may cause me to underestimate the variation that exists around racial ideology. Namely, that this study occurred at a predominately white institution, and that all these students selected to participate in this study. As this took place at a predominately white institution, with the respondents entering class being only 4% black, one could argue that I am missing those for whom race was the most important factor of selecting a college, and as such may have been drawn to attend an HBCU or other more diverse institution. However, even without that, I still have strong variation amongst how the students who did choose to attend the same school experience their racial identity. Also, respondents knew that this was a study in part about race from my initial recruitment email. This may have not appealed to those students who have the least connection to their black racial identity. Seeing as there is potential to have missed students with all types of racial ideologies, I do not worry that selection issues invalidate these findings. If anything, this means that I am underestimating the diversity of racial ideology that exists in the world. This makes me confident that I am observing a social fact and documenting meaningful patterns in how individuals understand their race. However, I do not seek to generalize outside of the bounds of this data itself or to make a causal claim about racial ideology. Rather, I seek to explain and understand the variation that exists within this sample in how they understand what it means to be black.

Table 2.1 Description of Respondent Characteristics

Name	**Second Interview**	**Gender**	**Mother's Education**	**Father's Education**	**Ethnicity**	**Social Class**
10	*5*					
Aaron	Yes	M	High School	High School	Black American	Working Class
Anthony		M	Graduate Degree	Bachelor's Degree	West Indian 2nd gen	Middle Class
Brittany	Yes	F	High School	High School	Black American	Middle Class
Dominique		F	High School	High School	Black American	Low Income
Evelyn	Yes	F	Graduate Degree	Graduate Degree	African 2nd gen	Upper Middle Class
Jasmine		F	Graduate Degree	Some College	Black American	Middle Class
Kiara	Yes	F	Some College	Some College	Black American	Middle Class
Lauren		F	High School	Less than HS	West Indian 2nd gen	Working Class
LeNae		F	Some College	Some College	Black American	Middle Class
Rebecca	Yes	F	Graduate Degree	Some College	Black American	Middle Class
7	*5*					
Emmanuel	Yes	M	Bachelor's Degree	Bachelor's Degree	African 2nd gen	Upper Middle Class
Jacquelyn	Yes	F	High School		Black American	Low Income
Malik	Yes	M	Some College	Some College	Black American	Lower Middle Class
Melahni	Yes	F	Some College	Some College	Black American	Low Income
Safiyah		F	Some College		West Indian 2nd gen	Low Income
Simone		F	Graduate Degree	Graduate Degree	African 2nd gen	Upper Middle Class

Timothy	Yes	M	Graduate Degree	Graduate Degree	African 2nd gen	Upper Middle Class
9	*5*					
Amanda	Yes	F	Graduate Degree	Graduate Degree	Black American	Upper Middle Class
Jade		F	Graduate Degree		Black American	Low Income
Jamila	Yes	F	Some College	High School	Black American	Middle Class
Lacey	Yes	F	High School	High School	Black American	Working Class
Megan		F	Some College	Some College	Black American	Working Class
Nina		F	Some College	Some College	Black American	Low Income
Rukayat	Yes	F	Graduate Degree	Graduate Degree	African 2nd gen	Upper Middle Class
Taylor		F	Bachelor's Degree	Bachelor's Degree	Black American	Middle Class
Tori	Yes	F	High School	High School	Black American	Working Class

For more information on the demographics of the respondents, see Table 2.1. The demographics of my sample are heavily female and include a large population of first- and second-generation immigrants. Initially, I wanted to craft a sample that had equal numbers of men and women. However, I had trouble reaching men to interview. At this university, just like many other higher education institutions, there are more black women than black men. The population of black students in these students' freshman class was 62% female and my sample is 80% female. My study is not explicitly about gender, but in many ways, gender informs how these respondents experience and make sense of their racial identity. Future work could and should look more explicitly at the gendered nature of these schemas. Additionally, I pay limited attention to the ethnic identity of the respondents. As black immigrants are overrepresented in selective universities, I thought it was important to include them in my sample. At several points in the analysis, I demonstrate how ethnicity is mattering for how these students make sense of their race, yet the focus of this study is much more on racial identity than ethnic or ethno-racial identity.

Interview Format and Process

My initial point of contact with each interview was a pre-screening questionnaire. In this questionnaire I asked about the race, educational attainment, and occupation of the student's parents and/or guardians. I also asked for their classification in school. My goal was to verify that students were in fact freshmen and identified as black or African American and to collect some baseline demographic information. No respondents were deemed ineligible as a result of the pre-screening questionnaire.

I scheduled interviews in a time and place that was convenient for each respondent. About half the interviews took place at a location of my choosing (mostly my on-campus office), while the other half took place at a location suggested by the student, which was typically the lounge or lobby of their dorm. These locations were mostly private and allowed respondents to speak freely and without fear of interruption. On four occasions, we moved locations in the middle of the interview, as the lounges got too crowded or were needed for other purposes.

I utilized a semi-structured interview protocol that allowed the interviews to be mostly conversational. All interviews were audio recorded and I took minimal notes during the interview, as I hoped for it to remain as informal feeling as possible for the respondents. Like Brown and Gilligan (1992), I allowed interviewees to lead the conversation, but at the natural pauses in their storytelling, I brought them back to subjects we had not yet covered. In doing so, I made sure to ask all of my questions to each respondent, albeit in a slightly different order that suited the conversation for each interview.

The interview protocol was developed based on 11 pilot interviews I conducted in 2014. The pilot interview protocol and the one used in this study are largely the same, with a few modifications in question order and wording. Based on the pilot interviews, I also added more explicit questions on racial socialization and color-blind ideology. While the data from the pilot study is not presented here, the experience of doing those interviews and the review of that data greatly informed the design of this study and the analysis thereof.

Freshman Year Interviews

In what follows I will provide an overview of the interview guide. Please see Appendix A for the full interview schedule. Interviews began with an introductory segment to understand more about their life before college. I asked questions about their hometown, family, home life,

and the neighborhood they grew up in. I invited them to tell me stories that would help establish rapport and set the tone for the interviews. I asked questions about a typical weekday in their home, as well as how they spent the weekends in high school. I then moved into more specific questions about their high school, including their school demographics, the types of activities they participated in, courses they took, and some information about their high school social life. After that, the interviews moved into early thoughts about college and the respondent's college search. I asked all respondents to tell me the story of when they first thought about going to college. I asked them to recount some of the early conversations they had with their family members about college. I asked respondents for their thoughts about attending particular types of schools, including HBCUs. This proved to be a fruitful question for the analysis, as respondents often had very strong feelings about HBCUs. I also invited each respondent to tell me the story of how they ended up at their current college.

Next, the interviews turned to their time in college thus far. We discussed their academic experience in college, as well as their social adjustment to college. I asked each respondent their thoughts about picking a major and what was important to them in a course of study. We also discussed their purpose for being in college. After discussing their college experience in particular, we moved to their thoughts about college more generally. I asked questions about the purpose of college in society, and whether or not they felt people with degrees differed from those without them. The next section of the interviews turned to race and college more specifically. I asked each respondent why they thought over all black students attended elite colleges at lower rates than their white and Asian peers. I also asked students about their experience being black on their campus. This was a key turning point in the interviews, where we moved from the questions about background and education that were generally easier for

students to answer, because as freshmen in college they were used to discussing their college search process and their experience in school thus far. Many of the interviews slowed down as we began discussing race and college, with respondents considering their answers more carefully. The answers to the questions in this section proved especially useful in the analysis for this dissertation.

I asked all students about whether they felt there was a black community on campus, if they felt they were part of that community, and if being part of that community was important to them. We also discussed how they felt black students on campus were doing as a whole, how they felt the university could better support black students, and how black students could better help themselves get ahead on campus.

The next section of the interviews provided most of the data presented in this study. In this portion, I focused in on student's racial identity. I began this section by asking what term they preferred to identify themselves: black, African American, black American, etc. For the remainder of the interview, I used their preferred term. I then asked each respondent what it means to them to be black (or their preferred term). I followed up by asking them how important their race is to how they see themselves. Other key questions in this section were: "Is it important to you to have black friends?" "Is it important to you to have romantic relationships with other black people?" and "What would you say some of the biggest challenges facing African-Americans are?"

The final sections of the interview focused on their understanding of social class in America and their own social class standing. This section of the interview was helpful in me compiling a profile of each respondent based on how they understand the American social class structure, and their place within it. The interviews concluded with their thoughts about the future,

including their own goals, and the ways in which they thought their lives at 40 would be similar to or different from their parents' lives at 40. That question proved to be very insightful into students thoughts about social mobility and reproduction and helped me to ascertain what they thought a "good life" looked like, by understanding what parts of their parent's lives they hoped to keep, and what they hoped to change.

After all my questions, I gave respondents the opportunity to clarify anything they said, add in something they thought I left out, or ask me any questions. Many of the respondents asked me what the study was for and seemed impressed or pleased when I told them it was for my dissertation research. Respondents overall told me they enjoyed the experience of being interviewed. Some even were reluctant to take the $20 incentive for completing the interview, as they said the interview felt cathartic or they were happy to help me in my research either because they felt the topic was important, or because they wanted to help me reach my educational goals. The average freshman year interview time was 95 minutes with the shortest interview being 55 minutes and the longest lasting just under three hours.

Sophomore Year Interviews

I also conducted 15 follow up interviews, which occurred approximately 1 year after the initial interview in the respondents' sophomore year. The multiple points of contact allowed me to delve deeper into personal narratives and build more rapport than a single point of contact would allow. Additionally, as I am interested in how the institutional contexts may shape worldview, it was imperative that I interview students at multiple points as they move through the university. The freshman year interview was able to capture students high school experiences and worldviews upon entering college. As freshmen during the initial interview, everything in the university was new to them. Allowing students to complete their first year, have a summer

break away from school and return to campus between the two interviews allowed students to reflect on their experiences in college as well as to be attuned to the ways in which they are changing while in college.

I contacted each respondent in the fall of their sophomore year requesting a follow-up interview. I reached out to each respondent at least three times. No respondent refused to be interviewed, but 6 students did not answer any of my emails. Three others responded to some of my communications but did not ever settle on a time to complete the interview. Ideally, I would have re-interviewed each student, but due to time and financial constraints, I ended data collection after conducting 15 Sophomore year interviews. Respondents received $30 for participating in the sophomore interview. Overall, these interviews were more relaxed than the initial interviews, with respondents who provided one-word answers in the first year giving detailed responses in the second year. 8 of the respondents told me they were excited to do the second interview and had been looking forward to me reaching out. These interviews lasted an average of 82 minutes with the shortest being 45 minutes and the longest 120 minutes.

Sophomore year interviews were designed in response to the major themes uncovered during the first round of data collection. See Appendix B for the full Sophomore year interview guide. Interviews began with a reflection on their first year in college. Respondents were invited to tell stories of their best and worst moments from freshman year. I asked respondents for updates on their academic and social lives, with specific questions about their majors, extracurricular involvement, housing situations, and friendships.

The next section of the interviews focused on race on campus. I repeated several questions from the first interviews, as I wanted to understand how their answers changed after spending more time on campus and becoming more enmeshed in the campus community. We

then discussed specific events that had occurred on campus, including the posting of racist flyers, the vandalism of an on-campus multicultural center, and the 2016 election. In the next section, we covered race more broadly. I again asked respondents what it means to be black and how important their race is to how they see themselves. A very illuminating line of questioning in the sophomore year interview was around how their understanding of race, racism, and what their race means to them have changed since being in college. In this section of the interviews, students told stories about learning from other racial and ethnic groups and getting a deeper understanding of how racism works. These responses helped me develop my arguments about the nature of racial identity that will be presented throughout the dissertation. In total, the sophomore year interviews helped me confirm some of my initial analyses and better understand how the schemas students used in college mattered for their college trajectories.

My role in the field

My identity as a black woman interviewing these students was an important part of the data collection. Despite our shared membership in the racial category, I remained conscious of the many ways in which I was still an outsider to the interview. As Naples (1996) argues, insiderness and outsiderness are ever-shifting permeable social locations. I am black, a student, a woman, and relatively close in age to the respondents. Thus, I shared membership in several important categories for respondents. However, I was also a graduate student, older than the respondents, and in a position of power as a researcher. For the most part, the respondents reacted to my insiderness and at times assumed shared knowledge by not fully explaining themselves or using shorthand language for experiences they thought we had in common. I asked follow up questions when respondents said “you know what I mean” and found other ways to challenge their claims,

including phrasing clarifying questions as "some people might say…" as a way to probe and get more nuanced responses, without feigning complete ignorance to topics that I am familiar with.

I am a graduate of Howard University, a Historically Black College, and I intentionally kept that information private from interviewees, unless they explicitly asked me about where I went to school after the interview concluded. I quickly saw that this was an important strategy as HBCUs, and Howard specifically, became a topic of conversation throughout many interviews, unprompted by me.

For example, when discussing how he made his college choice, I asked Timothy if there were any types of schools he knew he did not want to attend. He immediately said, "An HBCU. I knew for a fact I wouldn't last at an HBCU." Timothy went on to describe himself as an Oreo and said that he did not "act black enough to fit in at a place like that." He then continued on describing what he perceived as the inferior education of HBCUs and said "My parents, they have stories about how one of their friend's children went to an HBCU and then they transferred to a state school and they said the educational difference was so dramatic that there was no reason to ever go to an HBCU." As a person who did see a reason to go to an HBCU, I sat quietly and let him continue. As he went on, he discussed the demographics of the universities, as compared to major corporations, he mentioned Howard specifically. "If you look at most companies, the percentage is going to be exactly the same. If you go to, let's say, I don't know, Howard, what's the percentage of black people at Howard? It's mostly a bunch of black people." Timothy posited lots of rhetorical questions throughout the interview, but I took it upon myself to respond to this one and told him that Howard was about 87% black. "Ok, so it's like 90%. If you go there, and then you try to get a job at let's say, I don't know, Goldman Sachs, Goldman is probably going to be like 90% white, the complete opposite." While Timothy was completely

against Howard, other respondents had more neutral or favorable opinions of my alma mater. Having them discuss my university without knowing I went there helped me understand respondents' racial ideology in a way that they might not have done so had I been forthcoming with this information.

Respondents knew that I was a graduate student at the time of the interview, and many respondents mentioned being happy to help me with my study and asked me questions about graduate school at the close of the interview. Many respondents seemed glad to be interviewed and happy to know that I was going to highlight the diversity of the black student experience, something they did not feel was widely captured. I did not disclose any information about how I think about my own racial identity, class background, or educational background during the interviews, but respondents, especially women, sometimes drew upon me as an example during the interview process, imputing their own meaning onto me. My hair, worn in its natural, tightly coiled state, served as a particular point of conversation or comparison during the interview and discussions of black racial identity, with some respondents pointing to my hair in their discussions of the benefits/challenges of blackness.

Even though I tried to remain as neutral as possible to allow the respondents to have room to speak freely and not feel pressured to "say the right thing" or get the right answer on these very complicated and personal topics, there were times where my personal feelings did enter the interview. However, those moments ended up being very important for the analysis. The major example of this is my first interview with Jacqueline. She had very strong feelings that most discrimination faced by black people was in their own heads and that speaking and talking about identity was a net negative for the progress of black people. I was not expecting these responses and we went off script to have more of a conversation than an interview. Before

Jacqueline's interview, I had not fully considered that a respondent might have this worldview and did not have questions prepared to elicit this data. After her interview, I adjusted my interview protocol and added some questions including, "some people say that the best way forward is to be color-blind. What do you think about that?" This question proved to be pivotal in my analysis and helped me uncover one of the schema respondents were using to understand race. Had I not added these questions after my interview with Jacqueline, I would have missed key components of what I came to call the Conscientious Objector worldview.

Using Interviews to Study Culture

The study has certain limitations, but the match between question and design still provides numerous strengths that can give us insight to the experience of being black on campus. The small sample size means limited generalizability. Second, the interviews are based upon report and recollection, therefore there may be some recall error. There also may be a disconnect between what the respondents say and what they do. For this reason, scholars have been debating whether or not interviews are the appropriate way to study culture. As Jerolmack and Khan (2014) suggest, scholars should be clear about the potential for this disconnect and explicitly make the case that studying what people say they do can tell us important things about the social world. In this case, as I am studying how people think about what it means to be black, and how people frame their actions. The stories people tell are an important part of the work they do to create their identities (Somers 1994). It is more important to me how they talk about participating in the Black Student Union rather than documenting how many meetings of the Black Student Union they attend. In fact, many of the respondents in my study might have similar patterns of behavior. They are friends with black and white people, they have similar majors, they belong to similar organizations, they attend similar protests. But the differences lie in how they interpret

these actions. Therefore, interviewing is an appropriate study design to help me answer my research questions.

Coding and Analysis

Interviews were professionally transcribed, and then I reviewed and edited each transcript to correct for errors. Analysis began with within-case analysis (Miles and Huberman 1994) to understand each individual's life history and narrative, developing an in-depth profile for each case. I chose to give respondents pseudonyms as a way to maintain their confidentiality. While some argue that pseudonyms may provide a false sense of confidentiality or remove the possibility for verification of data (Jerolmack and Murphy 2017), I found giving pseudonyms as a largely unproblematic way to accurately present respondent data in a way that was particular to their experience while being respectful of their privacy. Respondents were informed on the consent form that they would be given a pseudonym as a way to preserve their confidentiality. I decided to choose respondent pseudonyms, rather than having them select their own, as a way to ensure that the names matched with the ethnic origin, tone, and style of their actual names. As discussed in Lahman et al (2015) participant pseudonyms have power, and I felt it was important that a person's name in the study and their birth name convey a similar sense of who the person is, so that their quotes are interpreted with a voice similar to their own. To come up with pseudonyms, I searched for respondents' actual names in popular baby name websites. I then selected a name that was listed as a potential sibling for a person with that name or listed in the "names similar to this one" tab. After completing within-case analysis and assigning pseudonyms, the interviews were open coded using Dedoose qualitative research software, and finally coded thematically (Emerson et al 1995).

While coding the data, I was attentive to the moments in which respondents were silent or made contradictory comments. Those moments were important to the analysis as they provided insight on what the students took for granted and did not have the ability to articulate, and also at times that which they had not considered. Paying attention to the times when respondents had little or nothing to say provided insight into what they feel is important (Young 2004).

Initial analysis revealed that respondents were interpreting their race in very different ways that seemed to have meaning for how they experienced college. I realized that I needed to catalogue and categorize these differences in order to fully evaluate them. I began by coding interviews based on an interpretation of the scale developed by Sellers et al in their 1998 paper, "Multidimensional model of racial identity: A reconceptualization of African American racial identity." While this scale was developed for close-ended survey responses, the strength of qualitative interviewing allows me to interpret open-ended responses and my specific follow-up questions to each interviewee to develop a profile of respondents. This method strengthens my understanding of how the respondents understood their racial identity as it came up naturally in conversations about seemingly unrelated topics, such as their college search, their romantic relationships, and their career paths in addition to my specific questions about racial identity.

Developing Ideal Types

While the Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity was an important starting point for me, but I ultimately developed my own typology of ideology that better suited my data. I reviewed each transcript to understand how people answered key questions about what their race meant to them. The patterns in the data lent themselves to the development of ideal types (Weber 1925). Ideal types are examples that distill a category to its most pure, prototypical and analytically sharp form (Brekhus 2003). Although real life individuals are messier than can be

captured by the clean and rigid categories presented here, these categories represent three distinct forms that help to illustrate how black people in America may conceptualize their race.

My initial impulse was to look for social class differences in racial ideology, so I reviewed the class backgrounds of each respondent to look for ways to group them along class lines. I reorganized the groupings until I found that respondents were more like those in the group than not. I generated a profile of the ideal of each group, then compared each respondent to the profile of their group to ensure that the profile captured the main elements of each respondents understanding of their racial identity. Analyzing the sophomore year interviews allowed me to test my categories and confirm initial placement. I assigned people to schemas based on their freshman year interviews, then looked to the sophomore year interviews to confirm their placement and document the ways in which their racial ideology has shifted from the initial interview.

Racial identity is a fluid and situational construct. It may be the case that my interview captured how they understood their race in a moment in time, particular to the very day we spoke and what happened moments before they walked into the interview setting. However, that is not to say that the interview moment is not a meaningful one. In the follow-up interviews, most respondents remained consistent in their worldviews, even at times repeating exact phrases. For example, when I asked Evelyn about the challenges facing black Americans in her first interview, she said, "I think the biggest challenge is overcoming the stereotypes and showing that we are powerful and more than what people think we are." In her sophomore year, fourteen months after the initial interview, she answered the question this way:

> I think the biggest challenge is showing people that we're not a stereotype, and showing people that we are powerful, we are educated, we know what we want to do, and there's more to us

> than what the media portrays us as and there's more to us than what people have seen in the past.

When respondents did have differences in their worldview across interviews, they were attuned to it and often pointed it out before I did. For example, in her sophomore year when Rebecca was telling me about the friends she has made in college so far, she told me this:

> Yeah, I know the first time I told you I wanted to make a lot of friends of different races and not just stick to black people. And I have done that, but now I appreciate my black friends more than I did before. I made a lot of friends who were you know, various ethnicities. I didn't want my race, to be everything about me. I didn't want to think of myself as just black. But I think I've come to realize that it's not something I should shed. So I'm glad I have all kinds of friends, but I'm also glad I have black friends.

Quotes like this one illuminate the strength of this study design. Rebecca's unprompted reflection of her growth highlights the ways in which her commitment to a schema was in flux over the course of her college experience, but still stable in its core. While all respondents showed some changes in their racial ideology between interviews, none had completely abandoned the schema they were using their freshman year. In the conclusion chapter, I will discuss this fluidity and development of racial identity in more detail.

The three groups presented here are named based on their understanding of the campus racial climate. For some, campus is a battlefield, with injustices strewn like landmines. For others campus is a diplomatic summit, where representatives advocate for the interests of their constituencies seeking compromise and bridging divides. For others, the campus is waging a war they see as unjust, and the ethical position is to protest on the sidelines.

Each of these groups has variation in their class backgrounds, ethnicity, and pre-college experiences. While there are some demographic patterns, such as the Commanders being all women, and the Conscientious Objectors having more black immigrants than other groups, I will

make the case throughout what follows that the adoption and use of the cultural schema is not directly tied to demographics. These schema are publicly available and shared, so students from all social locations had access to them. These background characteristics mattered for how these schema were adopted in some ways more than which schema was adopted.

Organization of the Dissertation

In the coming chapters, I will delineate how each of these groups make sense of their racial identity and how they use these cultural schemas to interpret what it means to be black. I devote two chapters to each group, with the first explicating the racial worldview of respondents, looking specifically at their self-concept, how they derive meaning from their race, and their views on racism and race relations. The second chapter on each group looks at how their racial identity matters for the way in which they experience college. I look closely at how each group approaches friendships, campus involvement, and choosing a major. The dissertation will conclude with some summary comments about the implications of this study.

CHAPTER III.
Rallying the Troops: Commanders Cultural Schema

Amanda entered the lounge of her dorm in a huff. When she made eye contact with me, she rushed over to the chair and dropped into the seat, slinging her backpack over the chair next to her and smoothing the hair around her messy ponytail. She rolled her eyes at a group of white students who were walking loudly through the lounge. “Ugh, they are so annoying.” As the interview continued, Amanda says that her mother advised her against going to colleges in the South, as she thought that she would not get along well in that environment. “The South’s not ready for you.” When I asked her what she meant, she laughed and told me that her mother often called her “radical.” Amanda went on to explain with a sigh, “she refers to me as Angela Davis because I’m always, like constantly, trying to argue with someone who said something ignorant. Whether it be race relations, economic status, or the plight of people of color everywhere. I’m just always trying to defend someone.” Amanda’s desire to constantly defend showed up throughout the interview. Whether the offender was her fellow high school Model U.N. students, professors, or people being annoying in the dorm lounge, Amanda felt no problem with confronting them and making her case.

During Amanda’s freshman orientation someone made a comment about black people being accepted to college because of affirmative action. Amanda told me she sat dumbfounded for a few seconds, but eventually rose to her feet and rallied the troops.

> All you people of color: you belong here! Don't you think for a second that you have to prove anything to anyone. 'Cause you don't! Cause we're here for a reason, that we have the merit, and the ability to be here. We don't have to prove anything to anyone!

Amanda recounted this moment with pride. She remembers the people of color in the audience clapping as she sat down. Fellow freshman students come up to her on campus and bring up the moment to her and are incredulous that she was willing to say something. "I got coined as the angry black woman of my orientation. People still bring it up and talk like I'm supposed to repent or something for saying what I did. But no. I meant it."

Amanda's adversarial approach to race relations is indicative of the Commanders. Always ready to rally the troops to defend black people and attack white supremacy when they see it, the Commanders believe that the way forward for black people is to work together and build the collective strength in their army. These respondents are proud to be black and see being black as one of the most important things about themselves. The Commanders see black people as being the epitome of excellence, and it is only through the structures of racism that there is a misguided perception otherwise. These respondents are proud to be black, proud to have black friends, and proud to spend their time in black spaces. The Commanders focused on authenticity as a key value in being black and felt that a good black person was one who spent time with other black people. In this chapter and the next, I will discuss the Commanders racial worldview, and argue that while it positions them to have a strong sense of self, the focus on racial authenticity alienates them from both non-black peers on campus, as well as black peers who understand their blackness through another cultural schema.

Before explaining the Commanders schema, I will briefly introduce the group. See Appendix C for a description of all respondents**.** I have characterized 9 women as Commanders.

6 of them were raised in predominantly black urban environments. Two of them were raised in mostly white suburban areas, and one in a rural area. 5 of the 9 had college educated parents, with the parents of three respondents earning graduate degrees. Neither of Tori or Lacey's parents attended college, while Jamila, Megan, and Nina's parents attended college for at least one year, but did not graduate. Two respondents, Rukayat and Amanda, grew up in upper middle-class families, based on their parents' education and occupation and their narrative description of their class background. Two respondents came from middle class backgrounds, three from working class families, and two from low-income. 8 of the 9 Commanders are black American, while Rukayat is a 2nd generation African immigrant. Three Commanders were on pre-med tracks, with four more majoring in the social sciences with hopes of becoming lawyers and clinical psychologists. Jade is a music performance major, and Taylor hopes to become a teacher.

Despite the variation in social class background, the racial composition of their neighborhoods and school experiences, these students have come to understand their blackness in similar ways. While all those I have named Commanders are women, this is not to imply that there are no black men who understand their racial identity in this way, but none were in this study. As I do not have black men Commanders with whom to compare these women, I will not fully be able to disentangle all the gendered elements of this cultural schema. What is presented here is how these black women experience their racial identity.

In what follows, I will explore the racial identity worldview of the Commanders. Specifically, I will focus on how race fits into how they see themselves, or their self-concept. Next, I will discuss the meaning and utility they derive from their black racial identity. Then, I

will introduce their racial ideology, or their beliefs about how black people should act. Finally, I will discuss how these respondents think about race relations and the challenges faced by black people. The chapter will end with some summary comments about this group.

It's Everything About Me - Self-Concept

Commanders focused on the unique experience of being black in America. They saw race as a defining characteristic of themselves, as well as how they experienced the world and the way in which the world experienced them. For the Commanders, race was a master status, superseding other salient social identities. These respondents highlighted the numerous ways in which being black organized their lives and shapes their personal characteristics. For Jade, a jazz performance major from Chicago, being black was inseparable from being herself. Her eyes danced as she talked about what being black meant to her.

> My blackness. I don't even know how to answer this. I see it in the mirror with the way I look. I hear it in my playing because I play like I'm black. I talk like I'm black, not because I use slang, because I speak with authority and with confidence. Talking black does not only mean talking with slang, it means you have confidence and self-assuredness. That's what talking black means. It's kind of ironic—yeah, being black empowers. It's everything about me, I guess.

Jade wore large earrings shaped like the continent of Africa, which hung just above her shoulders as she spoke animatedly about the joys of blackness. When I asked her about how being black influenced her music and other parts of her life, Jade said the following:

> Yeah, I think of myself as one person instead of separate parts, like, they're all related, like I'm very outspoken and loud because of how I was raised, which was by a black family. We were taught to believe in ourselves. I play soulfully because I'm black. My hair is curly because I'm African. Everything is related so I don't separate it.

These respondents highlighted the importance of being black to how they saw themselves, rendering their blackness inextricable from themselves. Megan was a first-generation college student from Detroit. When discussing what it means to be black and its place among her many other identities, Megan said:

> I feel like it's the biggest part. It's like, I'm black and I'm a woman, and then way down here I'm whatever else, I'm straight or whatever. Your life is surrounded by your skin color. I'm around my skin color all the time. It's a big deal to me…I'm honored to be black. I like my race.

Commanders, who as I have noted are all women, took an intersectional approach to their racial identity, commonly referring to the fact that they are black women. Just as the Commanders saw their racial identity as inextricable from themselves, they also presented their gender as almost equally as important. Commanders were the only women in the study to include their gender in their discussion of their race without me prompting them to do so. As this study focused on race, I did not ask explicit questions about gender, but these respondents on their own described themselves as black women in response to my questions about being a black person. Both their blackness and womanness was central to their sense of self and to their lived experience. As Tori described her racial identity she said it was, "Central, it's the most central thing. Being a black woman I would say is like the biggest thing, but then it's like I can't separate those two either."

A common variation of this theme was to position their race as slightly and only slightly, more important than their gender identity. Nina described herself this way, "Among all my identities, I think that black would be most important, and then being a woman." Or as Megan used her hands to demonstrate rungs on a ladder, "I'm black and then I'm a woman and then way

down here is whatever else. I'm straight or whatever." The Commanders saw themselves as black women, not just as black and not just as women. In this way they presented a gendered racial identity, or the intersection of racial and gender identity (Thomas et al 2011; Thomas et al 2013).

The fact that the Commanders had both the strongest ties to their racial identities and to their gender identity is not entirely surprising based on previous research. Thomas (2011) found that the black women interviewed who had the most defined racial identities also had the most well-developed gendered racial identities. However, in this study it is not the case that the Commanders were the only ones with well-developed or well examined racial identities. Rather, I would argue that both Commanders and Ambassadors, as well as some Conscientious Objectors had strong understandings of their race and what it meant to them. They simply varied in how they understood their race.

The Commanders were also very aware of the unique experience of being black as opposed to other stigmatized groups. As Megan said above, "I'm around my skin color all the time." Rukayat, the daughter of Ghanaian immigrants who plans on majoring in Psychology, explained this a bit more:

> [Being black] is central to who I am just because I think about it with other minorities, like the LGBT community. If you're a white homosexual man, you can hide that you're homosexual. I will never be able to hide that I'm black, ever. I can bleach my skin. My hair will still be very kinky and curly. I will always be black.

For the Commanders their race was immutable. It was not something about which they could be closeted. They perceived that the world would see them first as black women, and then anything else, so they came to see themselves as black women first, and then anything else. For these

respondents, being black was the most important part of themselves, and they were quick to describe how their blackness affected other parts of their lives.

In addition to what they described as the positive aspects of being black that these respondents felt were central to their existence, they also saw the constant presence of discrimination and oppression as an intrinsic part of blackness. When I asked Rukayat what it means to be black, she told me this:

> To be black means being, period. Meaning, overcoming the consistent adversity that I experience day to day. I thought about it in my psych class. I was just sitting there. I'm like, 'I'm black, and I'm here and I'm doing the damn thing, kind of.' It's just like living life to spite people not wanting you to live life.

Rukayat sat up in her seat and spoke proudly as she proclaimed, "I'm here." For her, being black meant a constant assault on her existence and happiness. Likewise, Megan described being black as being defined by the presence of struggle.

> It means that I have to work really hard and it means that just I go through more struggles than my peers have been. I don't know. I have a wish where I could go through an experiment where I could be white and then see what being black is like. I've been black my whole life so it's like I can't really see what it means to me, but I just know that it means you will have to struggle.

Amanda attributed her successes and failures to her blackness. Amanda is the daughter of two Ivy-League educated lawyers. She had very fair skin and reported frustration at people often asking her if she were biracial or not knowing that she was black. However, when we talked about what it means to be black and how her blackness fit with her other identities, Amanda emphatically reported that being black was crucial to how she saw herself, even if others did not readily see it within her.

> I think [being black] is a big part of who I am. I think that occasionally I'll attribute it to some of my downfalls or some of my successes, just because I guess it's easier in my mind to be like, 'Oh I didn't get that because' or 'oh he didn't like me because I'm black' or 'oh I didn't get that job because I'm black.' I would never tell it to anyone, but in my mind it, I don't know reasserts itself as possibly a reason for downfalls. Also, sometimes people are like, 'Maybe that's the only reason why you got something.'

As Amanda was so attuned to her blackness and how it was perceived by others meant that it was at the forefront of her mind every day. So much so that she described a sort of daily ritual preparing herself to deal with the struggle of being a black woman. "The struggle is a big part of who I am. On a day to day basis. I wake up in the morning being like, 'I'm a black woman and these are my obstacles to overcome.' It is difficult. It is difficult." This daily mantra was her preparation to enter a world she perceived as inherently unfair. She recognized that this understanding of the world meant that she was often exhausting herself with the struggle.

This exhaustion from the struggle suggests that Amanda, and other Commanders, may be dealing with "racial battle fatigue" which refers to "the physiological and psychological strain exacted on racially marginalized groups and the amount of energy lost dedicated to coping with racial microaggressions and racism" (Smith et al 2007, p. 555). The symptoms of racial battle fatigue can include tension headaches, elevated heartbeat, intrusive thoughts, an upset stomach, ulcers, loss of appetite, and elevated blood pressure (Smith et al 2007). Evidence of racial battle fatigue has been found in black women (Donovan 2012) and black mothers (Bailey-Fakhoury et al 2018; Mitchell 2018) as well as black college students who are doing activism work on campus (Franklin 2019; Gorski 2019). However, this was the only way that she and other Commanders knew how to interpret the world. To be black was to deal with struggle, and therefore they must be prepared to handle it, even at the risk of their own health and well-being.

As the above evidence demonstrates, Commanders felt their blackness was the most important thing about themselves and interpreted their individual characteristics and personal identities through the lens of their race and gender. They also connected blackness to an ever-present discrimination and saw race as immutable. This positioned their race above other identities, which they saw as more malleable and socially constructed.

"You Have to Represent" - Meaning

For these respondents, to be black meant to be excellent, and blackness was utilized as a source of strength upon which they could draw during difficult moments. Commanders invoked those who had come before, be it distant ancestors or close family members who had endured racism and discrimination to make their existence possible. This group also reported feeling pressure to live up to the example presented by those who came before. For Commanders this pressure was not about changing the perceptions of white Americans — it was about tapping into the more positive attributes of black people. Commanders saw the negative stereotypes as being incorrect, and that the true nature of black people was one of excellence. It was through racism and discrimination that negative framings of black people existed and persisted.

Jade described her frustration at what she deemed a mischaracterization of black people. She was adamant on reclaiming black excellence and repositioning black people in the minds of themselves first, and then of other people.

> Like, people would be all like, I remember a kind of loud guy saying, 'oh, you don't talk that black' when I'm talking academically and I'm like, I have confidence. Black people read books, black people are educated, black people are empowered. Why do I have to talk like Mo'Fo' Do' [not completing words] all the time. You think that's talking black? That's just something I'm very irritated with. People think that talking black, even black

> people, think that talking black means talking with slang. But talking black means talking with confidence. You have African ancestry means that you're proud of yourself.

Jade went on to talk about the lessons she learned from her mother about being a black woman, and said that her mother told her, "You have to be the best. You have to represent. That's just who we are as people." Jade's mother, and Jade herself, positioned black people as already being the best. Her "representing" was being her best self and tapping into her blackness, not distancing herself from or redefining blackness. Similarly, Nina's mother also instilled in her the idea that being black gave her a sort of superpower. She told me, "My mom has always been like, 'Nina, you're black, and you're wonderful because you're black.' She has always enforced in me that to be black is to be great." This idea that being black is to be great separates the Commanders from the other respondents in this study. For Commanders blackness did not need to be escaped, or to be rehabilitated. Rather, blackness was something to be fully embraced as is.

This notion of black excellence did create a pressure on respondents to "represent", with the aim of outperforming people's low expectations of them as black women. Taylor told me, "It's awesome to prove people wrong. If people don't want you to succeed as an African American person, it's awesome to be like 'Look what I'm doing.'" Rukayat echoed this in her interview. When I asked her to tell me about a moment when she was proud to be black, she told me the following:

> Honestly, when I got [accepted] into college. People said "Oh you got in because of affirmative action, that's awesome. I was just like, "actually I am just super smart. I did a lot in high school and I wrote bomb essays, and I'm black too." I guess it was just knowing that I had all these hurdles against me, and I still got in here.

Rukayat saw her individual achievement of being accepted into college as a racialized one, wherein her blackness helped her surpass what she perceived as others low expectations for herself.

In many ways, this group, like the Ambassadors, drew upon their blackness to explain their motivation for success. Lacey described the utility she gets from blackness this way:

> It just makes me more aware of everything. I'm constantly aware that I'm a little underestimated just because of my race. I feel like it makes me work harder, because I feel like there's always an impression of me in the workforce or in the classroom so I'm always doing extra things, like I participate more than I probably feel like I want to at the moment. I'm bored, but I'm going to raise my hand and speak. I work and when I'm working, I make sure my things-- like there are no errors. I double check my documents.

Lacey, and others in this group, see it as necessary to hold themselves to a higher standard than non-blacks do in order to prove people wrong and to live up to their high standards for themselves.

However, the Commanders are quick to articulate that perfection should not be a criterion for respect in the world. These respondents often drew upon examples of unarmed black victims of police brutality as evidence that it did not matter how law abiding you were, there still was a chance that you could be targeted for your race alone. Kerrison et al (2018) found a similar finding in their study of black millennials in Baltimore. The authors argue "state sponsored violence is bigger than 'hem lengths and waistlines.'...To argue that state-sponsored violence is even remotely correlated with Black citizens' respectability (or its proxy: publicly displayed clothing choice) is an ahistorical claim" (Kerrison et al 2018: 25).

Commanders pride in being black extended to what psychologists' term private regard, or their perception of other black people. They felt that black people were inherently good and looked to their ancestors perseverance through oppression as testament to excellence as the natural state of black people. These respondents were well aware of the negative stereotypes swirling around black bodies and did not find black people at fault for the existence of these stereotypes, rather they blamed the racial structure for the existing negative perceptions of black people. In this way, being black provided Commanders with motivation to be the best version of themselves.

"You See My Black Skin" - Rejection of Color-Blind Ideology

The Commanders' racial identity worldview includes a total rejection of a color-blind ideology. These respondents firmly believed that black people should be color-conscious and supportive of one another. As blackness was so central to them and their sense of self, the idea of being color blind was nonsensical. In part, they rejected the idea of being color blind as the idea would reject their sense of self. To be color-blind was to deny the cultural significance of being black, and to downplay the ways in which race mattered for lived experience. Megan described it this way:

> I hate the word color-blind. You're not blind to my color. You see my black skin. I'm not going to say, "I'm colorblind. I don't see color." I see that you're white, I see that you're Asian. I see these things and yes, it's a part of who you are. It's a huge part of who you are. It's your race. I hate the colorblind thing. You should know somebody and accept them and not be racist or what's that word? Prejudiced. You are who you are.

Lacey described it like this:

> I feel like race and ethnicity is important to people with identities. I feel like being black and being aware of my race and my history, I

> feel like it makes me stronger. It gives me more purpose. I don't feel like we need to be color blind in that sense like we don't see races because I definitely knew something, but I don't feel like people should pass judgement on people because of their races. I don't feel like being black should hinder me in the workforce. I don't feel like people should look at my color and make assumptions about me.

For the Commanders being black was a positive in their lives and largely shaped the way they saw themselves and the world. As they derived so much meaning from their race, for someone to claim to "not see their race" meant they were claiming to not see them. In addition to the cultural significance of race, these students were also aware that claiming to "not see race" also meant not seeing the ways in which race mattered for lived experience. Lacey described it as such:

> The reality is, I feel like race does mean something. It means a lot for health reasons, social factors, or academically. I feel like when they see a black applicant, they understand that this black applicant has had different experiences and I feel like it's important to note those different experiences because that person is black.

Tori also brought up the policy implications of color-blind ideology, like Lacey, focusing specifically on the way in which the university defines diversity and allocates resources based on race.

> That thing with like Barack Obama's election, and all that. They're like "okay racism is over," they want to move past it, but it's something that we need to talk about. I think that's the problem with the university too. It's like the diversity plan. Just like diversity means getting people with different beliefs, and that's what being diverse is. Like no. Diversity, it means race to some of us, and it means race to me, and they don't want to say that. Color blindness is not okay.

This strong rejection of color-blindness is a place in which Commanders differ most from Conscientious Objectors. As I will discuss in chapter VII, the latter group perceives color blindness as a positive progression in race relations and a way in which to undo the negative

implications of racism. However, Commanders view that approach as naive to the important consequences that race has for one's lived experience. Nina described this phenomenon like this:

> Being colorblind doesn't acknowledge people's identities. We have had race for such a long time, we just can't suddenly not have it anymore. Being color-blind also doesn't acknowledge problems that have been caused by race. If we were to somehow start having colorblind policies now, we would have a ton of problems that wouldn't get fixed. Also, so many beautiful things come of different races, like different cultures and stuff, and I think that those are important.

This strong rejection of color-blind ideology highlights many elements of what scholars call color-blind racism (Bonilla Silva 2006; Bonilla Silva 2015). Instinctively, the Commanders see that those who purport to be color-blind are invoking what Bonilla-Silva calls color-blind racial frames of abstract liberalism, cultural racism, and minimization of racism (Bonilla-Silva and Dietrich 2011). The Commanders perceive color-blindness as an inadequate solution to racial inequality. For the Commanders, the way for black people to get ahead is to lean into their race and instead of trying to minimize it, to have pride in it, and support other black people.

"We're getting better, but the world is just not" - Racism

An important component of understanding how these college students understand what it is to be black is to consider how they frame the problems facing black America. Understanding variation in how black people conceive of life as a member of a minoritized group is important for understanding the historical moment in which we live and shifts in racial attitudes. Black Americans have largely been concerned with racism as a key problem black people face, but not universally so. In Hirsch and Jack's (2012) interview study of 150 middle-class and working-class African Americans, they found that racism was listed as the most pressing problem faced by black Americans. The authors reported variation in how that racism was articulated, with

middle-class respondents pointing to a wider range of examples of institutionalized racism than the working-class respondents. Previous research (Hochschild 1996; Young 2004) also suggests that those in more segregated environments would less be able to articulate the structural nature of racism. However, in this study, the understanding of racism as being institutionalized or structural does not fall neatly along social class or pre-college experience lines. Rather, it is the Commanders, who come from a variety of backgrounds, who perceive institutional racism, specifically in criminal justice and education, as the most pressing problem facing black Americans.

The racial worldview of the Commanders meant that they saw discrimination as being built into the lived experience of being black. This oppression showed up for these students in ways large and small, at the micro and macro levels. Police brutality and the end of affirmative action policies were the major concern for these respondents. They acknowledged state sanctioned police violence as part of a larger system of oppression acting on black people. While others focused on the interpersonal racism and discrimination, the Commanders felt that these forms of structural racism were the most pressing issues facing black people. These interviews occurred at a time when viral videos of police killings were spurring hashtags of the names of unarmed black men and women who had been brutally killed. These shootings and their impacts on the community were referred to regularly throughout the duration of the interviews. While the Commanders were not the only ones who mentioned police brutality as a challenge facing black Americans, what sets them apart is their understanding of the issue as being one in which this violence is the responsibility of the police force or other state apparatus to curtail, and not that of the black community itself. Nina described it this way:

> I think our young people especially are doing so poorly, and it's not because of them. It's because of the way that they're being treated, especially when you think about all of the police brutality that's been going on, and even our younger children being shot and killed for no reason or being targeted because people are afraid of them.

In Nina, and other Commanders estimation of police brutality, it is not "because of them" that black people were being killed by arms of the state, rather that there were larger factors at play. These respondents looked to the prevalence of police brutality as evidence that the individual success of black people is not enough to end forms of racism that makes all black people susceptible to mistreatment. Nina went on to say, "We're doing well as individuals, but when you think about us and society, we still have such a long way to go to finally become equalized or at least at a greater level than we are right now. We're still on the bottom of the pole." Nina's quote here serves as a tacit critique of the Ambassador and Conscientious Objector worldview — namely that individual success is not enough to protect black bodies from the threat of state sanctioned violence. As Lacey said, "I feel like it's a lot of negative things still happening around black people even though we're working so hard to try to reverse some of those stereotypes and do positive things for the community. It's pretty bad, but we're getting better and the world is just not."

For the Commanders, these incidents of police brutality were also connected to larger systems of racism. As Nina put it, "the prison industrial complex and police brutality are the two main things plaguing us." Rukayat described the biggest challenges facing black Americans this way:

> The biggest challenge is still racism. I know that's very broad, but it's across all different areas of life. Like the workplace, like if you're going out, like driving, we still are experiencing racism. We

> are still disproportionately pulled over by cops despite the fact that white people always have more contraband on them, so it's like, what's happening?

When asked about challenges facing black Americans, Amanda sighed deeply and then said, “the racism is just baked into society. It’s everywhere. It’s everything. We’re not seen as fully human. We’re not seen as deserving to live, deserving to go to school, to have fun and listen to our music. Like everything is racist and everything is against us.” Jade echoed these responses when she said:

> We know that we are amazing, but the rest of the world doesn’t. And so, we get shot by police, and they make laws that protect the police and not the people. They find excuses to lock us up at higher rates and then act surprised when our communities are poor. We are doing the best we can but we’re up against a lot.

This focus on systemic racial issues differentiates Commanders. While they acknowledged interpersonal issues and microaggressions as issues as well, they linked those occurrences back to larger issues of a system of white supremacy that undergirded everything from police brutality, to college admission policies, to white classmates asking to touch their hair.

While Rukayat and Amanda grew up in upper middle-class families and lived in mostly white environments, Nina and Jade grew up in predominantly black neighborhoods with working class families. Yet, their understanding of the problems facing black Americans are more similar to each other than they are to those from similar backgrounds who have adopted different cultural schema. These respondents drew from popular discourse around the Black Lives Matter movement, posts they had seen shared on their social media profiles, and knowledge of structural racism they had gained in classrooms to explain their position. These publicly available, shared cultural schemas were available to all respondents and were adopted by the Commanders.

The Commanders are also characterized by their stance towards racism and discrimination when it happens. Commanders wholeheartedly believe that the best way to confront racism, bias, or discrimination is to call it out in the moment. For example, Taylor was frustrated at small comments made by white friends and peers in high school about other black people. She often overheard people assuming that because a person was black, they were from a single parent home, or uneducated, or prone to violence. In these moments she told me that she always will "just say what I have to say." In calling people out, she hoped to make the offender uncomfortable and question their assumptions.

> I'll just ask them, why would you assume because they're black they're ghetto? I just throw it back at them. I'm not trying to sympathize with them. I'm trying to get them to realize that what they're saying is wrong. I don't feel bad about being too harsh or hurting their feelings. I want them to be like, "Oh shit, I don't even know what to say." Make them feel so bad that they don't do it to somebody else.

Taylor's unabashed nature when it comes to race relations typifies the Commander response. These students feel it necessary to stand up for themselves and other black people in the face of discrimination or prejudice. Jamila told me that it is important to her to establish herself as a person who will not tolerate racial discrimination:

> I think it's important, I'm not one to just sit back if people are saying things that aren't exactly true about black people, I will always speak up, I'm not afraid to do that. I always take that as what is important. People just know not to say stuff around me, because they know that I'm real, and I'll call you out on it. I feel like that's an important thing as a black person too, that you want to establish with people. They should know that about you off the spot, that you don't take that.

This no-nonsense attitude about racism and willingness to go into battle is in large part how the Commanders earned their name. They believe it is their duty to support the troops (other black

people) and lead the charge against racial discrimination whenever they see it. They are willing to take a combative approach and to be proactive in talking about race and recognizing when they see bias, even if it makes them unpopular or saddles them with the label of being the "angry black woman." For these respondents, not speaking up, or doing so in a way that pacifies white people is a disservice to other black people. As Rukayat put it, "I can't afford to let shit slide. Somebody has to call these people out on their bullshit. Sometimes it has to be me. It isn't always fun, but it has to happen."

Becoming Commanders

While the Commanders come from a variety of class backgrounds, neighborhoods, and school contexts, they do share some things in common that have led them to adopt the Commanders cultural schema. These respondents discuss their having to come to terms with their racial identity and learning to accept themselves at a young age, years before attending college. More than the other two groups, Commanders reported grappling with their racial identity earlier in childhood, due to both interracial and intraracial encounters.

Rukayat grew up in a predominantly white small town. She experienced several instances of racism throughout her K-12 education, especially in middle school. "Middle school was awful. Like terrible. People left notes on my locker, calling me the N-word, the B-word, everything. I hated everything and everyone." In these moments of being one of the only black students in her school, Rukayat came to understand that other people were going to define her by her race, no matter what she did. Rukayat interpreted this situation as evidence that her blackness was inextricable from herself and that the way to overcome the torment was to embrace her blackness and learn to love herself, even when others did not.

Amanda faced a combination of inter-racial and intraracial encounters which made her question her racial identity. As she grew up with upper-middle class parents, she felt disconnected from the common narrative that connected the black experience with urban poverty. She found herself not relating to the black people in her school, with whom she did not share any classes due to the racialized tracking at her high school. Feeling isolated from both black and white people, Amanda initially began to deemphasize her black racial identity and distance herself from black people, as she did not find a place for a light skin, upper middle-class black girl such as herself. She felt that identifying as black was to be identifying with oppression. However, in middle school, Amanda says she was tired of being sad about being black and became determined to learn more about black culture. In doing so, she found a way to accept herself and embrace blackness. She contrasts the investigation and self-discovery she did with her parents, whom she describes as self-hating.

> It's a beautiful culture, and once I began to learn about that and realize that what is stereotypically thought to be black is not the whole story. That's just one single thread of a multi-dimensional culture. Once I realized that, I stopped being scared. I think that my parents didn't really have the time to develop that side of themselves, really investigating into black culture and really being proud of it. They don't see the merit to it.

Once Amanda began to "see the merit" of black culture, she began to widen her definition of blackness and find a place for herself within it. She stopped being ashamed of being black and found a new sense of pride.

Similarly, Tori was not always proud to be black. She attended a low-income, all black school and lived in an all-black neighborhood. For her, blackness was associated with poverty,

and she felt that in order to escape poverty, she needed to distance herself from black people. Tori described it this way:

> In middle school like I hated going to a black school. I was like y'all are ghetto, and so the transition from 8th grade to high school. Like looking at different high schools I just really wanted to go to a school in the suburbs, but I knew it was like impossible. My parents aren't going to drive me anywhere, and all that kind of stuff. 8th grade was very strange. I like hated being black.

In the interview, this moment surprised me as the young woman in front of me was very proud to be black and spoke glowingly about the joys of blackness earlier in the interview. When I asked how she got over her hatred of being black, she said told me the importance of role models who helped her discover more about her racial identity.

> High school my principals, and then my guidance counselor, I don't know what exactly it did, but we had a black history month, that was really big. Then, just touring college campuses. I don't know. They made us feel important, and special. They helped me see that there was like, beauty in being black. And I didn't see that before. It sounds dumb now because I love being black, but until they kind of opened my eyes, I hated it.

The very high school that Tori wanted to avoid by going to the suburbs held the teachers and administrators who helped her develop a love for herself and her community.

The sense of exploration and discovery of black history and culture was a major theme for the Commanders. In some ways, this sounds like psychologist William Cross's (1971; 1978) model for black racial identity. He argues that there are five stages: pre-encounter, encounter, immersion-emersion, internalization, and internalization-commitment. Cross would describe the notes in Rukayat's locker as the encounter that would then lead to her discover and explore her blackness. Cross describes a linear trajectory through racial identity development, that includes a stop at an intense commitment to a black racial identity and a negative view of all things

connected to white people and white culture. However, what I have presented here demonstrates some of the many issues of the Cross model.

The Commanders' experiences did serve as the material for them to interpret, however they chose a cultural schema to help them do so. One could imagine a scenario in which when faced with the negative experiences of experiencing racism or being isolated from black and white students in their schools or feeling frustrated by being segregated in an impoverished neighborhood, one could choose a different interpretation of being black. In fact, in future chapters, I will introduce respondents who did face similar situations, yet made sense of them in wildly different ways. For the Commanders, these experiences in adolescence led them to learn more about being black, and they came to frame their blackness as being an important part of themselves, that has room enough for many forms of expression. Whereas other respondents came to see blackness as the negative stigma that caused them shame, embarrassment or guilt, these respondents interpreted blackness as a strength and the outside world's perception of being black was what led others to think of it as anything else.

Commanders also spoke explicitly about the importance of social media movements in their development of a positive sense of self and pride in their blackness. When I asked Rukayat about the state of blacks in America, she began by quickly saying, "We're suffering." However, after she discussed the perils of police brutality, she continued by saying, "But we're also flourishing because there's a lot more body positivity, and with black social media we have hashtags like carefree black girl, black excellence, or black girl magic or black girls rock. We are promoting more self-love at a younger age, which is amazing." These online movements present an alternative to what Patricia Hill Collins (2004) has named the racist controlling

images of the angry black woman. These social media movements provide rich cultural material that Commanders draw from to make sense of their blackness.

The "carefree black girl" movement celebrates joy, freedom, and black women being unapologetically themselves (Mooney 2018). This social media hashtag can often be found under posts of girls smiling and laughing with groups of friends, frolicking in fields of flowers, or transgressing respectability politics. The respondents in this study invoked "carefree black girl" "black girl magic" and "living their best lives" as they drew from schema they were introduced to online. These hashtags and social media movements were available to all the women in the study, despite where they came from or their pre-college experiences. This highlights the importance of how information received online can shape real world interactions. For these women, these phrases were more than Instagram hashtags, but rather were mantras that helped them interpret and frame their black womanhood. Seeing a black girl on campus win an award or be elected to a position in a student organization was interpreted as evidence of her "black girl magic." Before or after the interviews, the Commanders often complimented me on my hair, or told me that my "melanin was poppin'". These subtle moments also affirmed and celebrated their relationship with me, each other, and black women more broadly.

For the women in this study, the carefree black girl was aspirational, and not their constant state of being. These girls were full of cares about school, relationships, their futures, and were worn down by the daily onslaught of racial microaggressions. However, for the Commanders, being carefree black girls and relishing in the magic of their melanin allowed them to reframe their daily struggles as a testament to their resilience they possessed by the nature of them being black women.

Discussion

In total, this group saw their blackness as a key part of themselves at all times in all spaces. They understood their blackness as a defining characteristic, and one that informed every aspect of their lives. They believed that spending time with other black people and in black spaces was ideal for both self-preservation and racial uplift. They drew upon their blackness as inspiration for and explanation of their own success. In these ways, being black was central to their identity.

These respondents were proud to be black and had come to this pride through exploration and discovery. The Commanders understood that being black meant they would encounter racism, discrimination, and oppression. They felt that this discrimination was baked into the fabric of American society and was not the fault of the actions of black people. This interpretation of being black helped them have pride in their race, in part because they saw value and virtue in black culture outside of the discrimination they faced. Whereas other respondents saw blackness as being devoid of culture or possessing a problematic culture, the Commanders spoke highly of rich elements of black culture and positioned black people as being inherently excellent. This framing of their blackness helped them to think positively of themselves and other people.

While for the most part adhering to this cultural schema gave the Commanders a sense of confidence and pride, it is not without its drawbacks. As I will discuss in the next chapter, the Commanders strong emotional attachment to the schema created some moments of intraracial and interracial conflict on the college campus.

CHAPTER IV.

"I'm Trying to Find the *Real* Black People": Commanders on Campus

In the previous chapter I explored how the Commanders understand what it means to be black. In this chapter, I focus on how this schema played out on the college campus and mattered for their college experience. Specifically, I look at how these students navigated the social and academic aspect of college, including how they made friends on campus, how they interacted with the campus black community, their extra-curricular involvement and their major selection and intended career paths. I find that in each of these arenas, the Commanders use their racial schema to interpret the structural conditions and conceive of possible actions. I argue that while these students' understanding of their black racial identity gives them a source of pride and confidence, their intense emotional attachment to their race limited their options for meaningful relationships both inter and intra-racially. The commitment to this cultural schema shapes who they saw as potential friends, what clubs they joined, and what they saw as a valuable major and potential career path. I will explore the boundaries these students drew and explain their strong sense of racial authenticity and how they thought a "real" black person should act on campus.

Searching for "Real" Black People on Campus

As discussed in the previous chapter, the Commanders believed that black Americans should have pride in black culture and spend time in black spaces and with other black people as a means of coping with discrimination as well as a strategy to get ahead. This racial ideology shaped their social life on campus and their thoughts about making friends. Whereas

Ambassadors took black friends as a given and were anticipating developing non-black friends to learn from, share with, and to put them in beneficial social positions, the Commanders were confident that they would be in enough non-black spaces for their professional and academic success, and were looking for strong black friendships as a sort of respite from the potentially harmful interracial encounters they expected to experience. These respondents touted the benefits of black friendships and black relationships as both an individual personal choice and at a group-level as the way for racial uplift.

Commanders' commitment to black spaces as a site of uplift translated to their individual friendships. While the Ambassadors thought that friendships with other black people would come naturally and that their attention should be placed on making friends with non-black people, Commanders felt that making friends with black people was an important part of their black identity.

Taylor is a track runner, and the daughter of a pre-school teacher and accountant, who are now divorced. Her parents met in college and she wants to mirror many aspects of their college experience, but especially their close-knit black friend group. Taylor said:

> I have a lot of black friends and from my track team. I have a ton of really close black friends, but I guess in my everyday life I am definitely around more white people I feel like. I hope that can change, or not even change, I don't see it as a problem, because I still have a group of black friends. I would definitely like to have a closer group of black friends. That's definitely one of the things, not a goal in college, but I hope I can find it in college. I think that's important.

Taylor saw making black friends as a way to strengthen her college experience and adult life. For Lacey, having black friends was a respite from the pressure to code switch, or alternating between her black vernacular and the more standard English.

> I identify more with black friends. I don't like to code switch, but I will do it because it's important. I don't like to code switch. I like to be able to speak and know what I'm talking about.

Lacey's frustration with code switching was not limited to her interactions with white people. Lacey felt frustrated when she could not freely express herself around other black students as well. Lacey felt like a true black person would understand her word choice and communication style. She was frustrated when she encountered black people who did not understand her way of speaking.

> I met this guy the other day who was black physically, but he didn't understand what I was saying at all and I'm like, I don't even think I was using too much slang. I don't even think I used slang. He just didn't understand. I've never talked to someone, who every five seconds, is like what do you mean? That was so frustrating. I don't know what we were talking about. I would say something, and I think the way I worded it was fine and then it just didn't resonate with him. And he didn't even try. He just acted like I was dumb. I see my friend looking at me like what is his problem. I like to be able to talk openly, and you understand what I'm saying. I like to have effective communication. When I talk to black people, they get it, like *real* black people get it. It's like we're having a conversation, so I don't have to reiterate or try to re-word what I'm saying. I feel like that's important. It's important to have those conversations versus having to spruce it up or think about it, put too much thought into it.

For Lacey, this encounter highlighted the lack of who she deems as real black people on campus. Lacey valued people with whom she can communicate comfortably. Those who easily could understand her communication style. She found that not every black person met that standard, even though she thought coming into college that her communication style was widely practiced by all black people. Thus, her shock when others did not understand her. Previous research might suggest that Lacey's frustration with other black people on campus is due to her pre-college experiences of living in a racially segregated neighborhood (Torres and Massey 2012). In some

ways, she did have a narrow sense of what it means to be black that is tied to her particular class location, but Lacey's frustration was not just with those who grew up in a different class background and had different speech patterns, rather her frustration was with those who were not willing to overcome those differences on the basis of shared membership in a racial category. Lacey did not expect that "real black people" always or only spoke in her same vernacular, but that "real black people" would accept her no matter how she spoke. For Lacey, in part "real black people" spoke in a similar way as she did, but also, "real black people" were willing to bridge any cultural divides because they saw themselves as being part of the same team.

These respondents also saw black friends as being important as a way to decompress and process the negative experience they would face as members of a racial minority. Tori said that black friends were important because they were also "in the struggle. They understand the feelings of loneliness and isolation." For Nina, although her number one criteria in friends was people who she could "be weird with," black friends were also important to "have people that you can talk about oppression with, and just the daily shit that you have to go through with white people."

Jade also sees being around black people as a way to have people to process the experience of being in the minority. She saw other black people as a safe space to vent her frustrations with daily life as a racial minority.

> I do think that it is important to have someone who is black though, just because the fact that you may be experiencing something that your white friends may not simply understand or have gone through. In that case, it's good ... especially when you're at a place like this, where there's so many nonblack people around you. You want to have someone you can go to who you can talk to who won't be like, "Oh my gosh, you're racist." Or something crazy like that. "You're trying to discriminate." Like, no this is something that happens. If I'm going through something and I feel

> a certain way about it because of my skin color, I would want to go to someone who I can relate to.

Amanda had not yet found a close group of black friends, but desperately wanted to do so.

> I just want some people to bounce experiences off of. So we feel like we're I guess one, like a community. I don't know, you have those moments where you're just like, "Crazy white people," you can just bond over them. Also you can talk about micro-aggressions. It's something that I can't talk about with white people, or the majority of white people, because they just don't understand the concept. Just those little aspects of racism, and breaking it down, and understanding it with other people. It's really valuable.

As the Commanders recognized being black as being rife with struggle, they saw black friendships as necessary to decompress from the battle. These friendships with black people were seen as natural and self-evident as part of their black life. Also, these friendships were important as a strategy to overcome the what they deemed as the inevitable racism and discrimination they would experience as a racial minority. This desire for black friendships cut across class lines. Amanda grew up in a predominantly white environment and found value in black friends, and so did Lacey who grew up in predominantly black environments. While they differed greatly in their class backgrounds and upbringings, these respondents shared a racial ideology that prioritized black friendships as a source of support.

In addition to shaping their attitudes towards friendship, their racial ideology shaped the way in which Commanders approached the larger black community on campus. For the Commanders, sticking together and supporting one another was a crucial strategy for success for black students on campus. The Commanders felt that a good black person was one who supported all other black people, regardless of whether or not they knew them, were friends with them, or had any shared interests. The Commanders defined racial authenticity around this

willingness to support black people at large, and measured other people's blackness on their adherence to this worldview.

Jamila described community and support as being key parts of the black experience. For her, to be black should be to lift up and support other black people. She described it to me this way:

> I feel like being black is being proud of where we came from, being supportive of each other. As a black person I feel like it's my duty to be there for the next black person or support them, encourage them. We don't want to see each other do bad, because if one of us make it we all need to make it. I feel like that's part of what being black is.

Like Jamila, Megan also saw the black community as a source of support and inspiration. Megan told me that "the black community just encourages you to do better. I just like it." This sense of duty and obligation to other black people highlights the ideology of the Commanders. For these respondents, a good black person was one who supported other black people and worked with them to build success for all black people.

The Commanders ideas about racial authenticity were far more defined than the other groups. Conversations around racial authenticity run the risk of essentializing race and implying that there is one inherently correct way to articulate racial identity. Often times, the assumption is that a "true" black identity is one that expressed cultural tastes associated with lower-income, urban black America. However, when the Commanders described "real" blackness, they only did so primarily on the basis of acknowledging and supporting other black students on campus. These respondents did not invoke academic performance, such as suggested by oppositional culture theorists (Fordham and Ogbu 1986). Instead, more in line with Prudence Carter's (2005) findings, the Commanders accused these students of not being real if they did not follow cultural

rules of engagement. Not speaking to other black people on campus was seen as a major indicator that a person was not "really black."

Lacey, a first-generation college student, had a very clear sense for the appropriate way a black person should act. She felt that if a person did not perform their blackness in the way she deemed appropriate, they were not authentically black. When asked what being black meant to her, she said the following:

> Being black is more than just your skin color. I feel like it's founded on your beliefs also and how you act, how you represent yourself. There are a lot of black people here who I won't say are black. They say [the school] is 3 or 4% [black] but you've got to knock off about half of them. So, I'm still just trying to find the real black people.

Lacey went on to describe the actions of a person that she would knock off her list. She said, "There's one black boy, he was just walking around with a group of three white friends." Lacey shook her head in disgust as she spoke, while continuing "He didn't even speak to me when he saw me." Not acknowledging another black person and having white friends ran counter to Lacey's racial ideology. Speaking to one another on campus and other symbolic gestures of greeting, can be more than just a simple hello, but an adaptive strategy for navigating majority white institutions. As Jones (2017) found in his study of black congressional workers, the practice of nodding can acknowledge a shared experience, build networks, and signal visibility for those who feel invisible in a majority white institution. As these college students walk the halls of their classrooms, having other black people speak to them, even those they did not know, was an acknowledgement that they were seen, valued, and affirmed. Therefore, when they do not receive that recognition, the Commanders take it as a personal affront and an indictment of a person's blackness.

Lacey continued to describe what made a "real" black person in her estimation by saying, "to be black, I feel like you need to have a certain mindset and have to be aware that you are black and you have to be happy about that. You have to be comfortable in your own skin." Megan echoed Lacey when she said the following:

> I feel like if you aren't a part of the black community, unless you are in the black community and some people are just kind of like self-hating. They just really want to be solely with white people or you're just lonely and you're just in these books.

I asked Megan to clarify what counted to her as being part of the black community. I wanted to understand what signals were important in terms of knowing that someone was "really black" and not self-hating as she described them.

> Going to the Union Basement [a popular campus hangout spot for black students]. Speaking to people. It's so many orgs, so many events all the time. Just go, just meet people. Network. Just be a part of things. Have black friends. I can see a black person and they'll be with their friend Alec and Brett and I don't see them as really a part of the campus black community. I'm not saying they're not really black, but…

Megan trailed off, implying that she did in fact think that a black person who hung out with white people, whom she told me she often referred to as Alec's or Brett's or other names that she deemed as stereotypically white as a kind of shorthand with her friends, was not truly black. I asked her if having any white friends at all made someone "not really black" or if it was something else. Megan clarified that to her, a person is not really black if "That's where they spend most of the time. That's what they feel a part of. If they don't speak when they see another black person then they're not really black." This is an important distinction that Megan draws. The Commanders understood that out of necessity, proximity, or commonality, black students

would have friends that were not black. However, it was the act of ignoring other black people or not spending time with black people in addition to their white friends that crossed a line.

Rukayat also described someone who she felt had “lost himself.” She rolled her eyes as she described one black man she knew on campus.

> There’s this one kid who is just the worst. Honestly, he's just rude to begin with, so that was just sad, and then he only has joined predominantly white organizations, so he's in one of the white frats and I think he's part of the young Republicans, and your politics and your race aren't linked, but, it's kind of linked, let's be real. I feel like you forget that you're black, and people are thinking against you, as much as you want to say they're not. We'll forget certain things. You'll let your friends slide with saying the "n" word and other things. Things that clearly aren't okay, because you aren't surrounded by people that remind you why it's not okay, and why we feel like keep fighting to better ourselves and others.

For Rukayat, if you surround yourself with white people, there was a danger that you might “forget” that you were black. This idea of “forgetting” oneself or “losing” yourself was an important one for the Commanders. They felt as if being around too many white people too often might cause them to lose their sense of self and purpose as a black person in America. This was seen as the ultimate sin and as the ultimate disgrace.

For the Commanders, speaking to other black people, supporting other black people, and feeling close to other black people was the mark of a good black person. Whereas the Ambassadors defined a good black person as one who did not segregate themselves and was willing to be around white people and make white friends, the Commanders thought that a good black person was one who was willing to speak to other black people and be part of the black community in specific ways. This is not to say that these outlooks are mutually exclusive. Respondents in all groups tried to make friends with white people, tried to make friends with black people and attend black events, and tried to be fully immersed in the University

community. In the objective sense, the lives of many students across these ideal types look very similar in terms of their number of friends of different races, the names of the student organizations they joined, the amount of time they spent around same race peers, etc. What distinguished the groups was the meaning they attributed to these actions and the value they placed on them.

For the Commanders, being around other black people was not simply a choice or a duty as a black person. It was also seen as a necessary consequence of being black in this world. These students saw spending time with other black people as a form of self-care and a way to build the strength to endure the pressure of being a racial minority. Rukayat described the need for black friends as essential to her survival. When detailing some of her encounters on campus that she felt were at best racially insensitive and at worst blatantly racist, she told me of how she coped:

> Other people will be like, 'Why do black people only talk to black people?' It's like, 'Really?' Like, why do you sit down? It's because you're tired. And you are tiring. I get tired. It takes a lot of work to consistently deal with white people day in and day out.

For Rukayat, and other respondents, having black friends was not a frivolous choice, but rather a strategy for survival in dealing with what she believed was the constant burden of being in white social and academic spaces. Amanda echoed this as she discussed her search to find black people on campus. As this interview occurred ten weeks into her freshman year, she had not yet found black spaces on campus. Amanda told me the following:

> It is so important for me [to find a black community] on campus. And sometimes I wish it wasn't as much. Sometimes I think it would be easier here to kind of go with the flow and not want or need the black community as much and just chill with the white people because there's so many of them…because it is actually quite difficult to find black people on campus for me. Like you

> could probably walk from here [across campus] and not see a single black person on certain days. That's a little bit upsetting for me. I try to put it out of my mind, but I think about race all the time. So I want to find black people I can talk to about these things. But it's so hard to find them.

Amanda lamented that she needed a black community and was not in the position to find one. She saw black friends as a necessary part of her survival on campus and felt that on the strength of solid black friendships, she could endure the experience of being a racial minority, or more specifically, being black, on this campus. Amanda's acknowledgement that it would "be easier to go with the flow" reflects her awareness of other racial ideologies or understandings of being black. As I will discuss later, the Conscientious Objectors see the few number of black students on campus and conclude that the logical course of action is to be friends with the people in the majority and the peers who are readily available to them. Amanda and other Commanders--who are dealing with the same structural conditions as Conscientious Objectors, conclude based on their interpretation of themselves, society, and what it means to be black, seeking black people, no matter how hard they are to find, is the necessary course of action. Amanda knows that some people are able to not as acutely need black spaces to make it through the day, but is aware that for her, black friendships and black cultural spaces are vital to her survival.

"Black People Do Not Have Enough Institutionalized Power to Be Acting Like This"

In addition to their social lives, the Commanders schema helped them structure their commitments to extracurricular activities. For the Commanders, race mattered greatly for their campus involvement. They felt a responsibility to combat instances of racism when they occurred on campus, and to take up the slack where they felt the university was not doing enough. They were critical of the racial dynamics of all the organizations to which they belonged, even the black organizations. Commanders balanced their time between black affinity

and professional groups with other sorts of campus activities that fed their interests. Despite the purpose of the organizations they joined, the racial dynamics of the club dictated how committed they remained.

Rukayat was involved in several organizations, both that fed her passions and interests as well as pre-professional ones. In her second year interview, she told me that her favorite organization was the Glee Club. She laughed as she told me about it, as she felt that her love for the Glee Club would be unexpected based on everything else we had discussed.

> It has to be one of the whitest orgs on campus. It's a bunch of preppy white girls together and like a couple other people like myself who just aren't that preppy or that white. It's just nice to have this place to go and sing and enjoy music, which I love. That's most of my time, and I'm the social chair….That's great. I love it. I love Glee. I'm not dropping it anytime soon.

Even though much of Rukayat's time on campus is spent affirming herself and other black peers, she still is able to find time for an organization that she loves that is not connected to her racial identity. However, she is still very aware of the racial dynamics of Glee Club and the other organizations she participates in. She told me about another club about women's reproductive rights on campus that she no longer participates in. "I haven't been at all this year. Mostly because last year one of the presidents was a woman of color, so that made me feel safe going. Now it's just two white women that I don't know that well who never really made much of an effort to talk to me, so it's just, well, I guess I'll just not show up."

For Rukayat, no matter how much she liked the organization, if she did not feel seen and safe as a black woman in the space, she would not be a part of it. That extended to the Black Student Union, which after her drama with the organization in her freshman year, she stopped attending. "The BSU people, I just can't with them anymore. So I'm more involved in African

Students Association, so that's nice to do things with other African people. I guess Glee Club and ASA are where I spend most of my time."

Amanda spent her time in an ethics club that allowed students to discuss topically relevant ethical dilemmas of the day. However, she also spent a lot of time going to both the Young Conservatives club and Young Democrat club meetings. She describes her time in the Young Conservatives as trolling.

> I'm not conservative at all but I like to make them think I am. Because you get to catch them saying the most racist shit. 'Cause they let their guard down in front of you because they think you're one of them. I'm not at all down with what they have to say and I've heard them say some really, really repugnant stuff.

Amanda's involvement in the Young Conservatives club involved her being a convincing actress. So much so, that the executive board asked her if she would be their Minority Outreach chair. Amanda laughed at the suggestion, as she was the only black person there, and she was not sure if due to her very light skin the conservatives knew she was black, or just pegged her as some kind of racial other. At any rate, she enjoyed her time observing their meetings and found herself learning about Marxism and other forms of political thought to better interrogate their arguments. "It's kind of a weird way to spend my time. But I like being an informant. I'm learning a lot from it."

In addition to these political clubs, Amanda was interested in joining a black Greek letter organization. However, she was put off by the level of secrecy around the intake process. She saw someone wearing a jacket of the organization she was interested in, and spoke to them and asked how to join the organization. Amanda was then publicly shamed for that, and was soon made to realize it was a faux pas. After this, the girl no longer spoke to Amanda, which drastically reduced her interest in joining.

> Since then, I've been like, "You know what screw them. I don't need that." Because like, this secretive B.S. I was like, "Black people do not have enough institutionalized power to be acting like this." I was like, "We just don't have it like that. You need to take all that you can get." If someone wants to be a part of your club, let them be a part of your club. If they are black and really want to contribute, what is the problem? I don't understand. We are at a PWI, there are already so few of us. Why so secretive? Why exclude people? It's all dumb. We need to be sticking together. There aren't enough of us to be divided!

Amanda's clear statement of "black people do not have enough institutional power to be acting like this" typifies her Commander stance. For Amanda, and the other Commanders, black people's strength was in the collective, and it was only through working together that they would be able to improve their social and political standing on campus, be able to gain the institutional power that she deemed them to be lacking. So, she, like many Commanders became increasingly frustrated with the black campus organizations, as they found their politics and social organization counterproductive.

Several of the Commanders stopped attending BSU meetings or events because they felt the politics of the group were not inclusive enough for women. Being black was not enough to tie them to these organizations, as they demanded spaces that were inclusive of black people with a variety of experiences and were united in doing the work of bettering the lives of black students, and not caught up in what the Commanders considered petty politics.

When describing her campus involvement in her Sophomore year interview, Tori became increasingly frustrated when recounting her experience with the Black Student Union. "I definitely tried to get involved in the black community but the sexism was just too much. I don't even know how to put it in words. The entire BSU is just so sexist, I can't deal." Tori went on to describe her experience running for a position for which she thought she was very qualified after

having done work on the committee all school year long. “But then out of nowhere, the BSU President’s friend, who has maybe come to one meeting just shows up and is basically like handed the position over me. He’d done nothing, but all the guys were like ‘Here is a title! Here you go!’ and he had no ideas or anything.” Tori became very emotional as she told me about this story. After some incidents of on campus racism, Tori and a few other female students organized some protests on campus. This activity got her an invite to dinner with the President of the university and the opportunity to share her grievances with the school’s Vice Provost for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. All of Tori’s energy went to the work she was putting into these issues, to the point where she stopped regularly attending classes. Her grades and social life suffered. However, she knew that the work she was doing was important to her fellow black students and to the BSU as a whole. Therefore, when she was denied a leadership position, which she felt she had earned through sacrificing her academics, health, and well-being, she was devastated.

Rukayat echoed Tori’s frustration with the black men on campus. When she described her campus involvement in her Sophomore interview, Rukayat declared “the black community on campus is led by specific groups of black men that only care about other black men. They’re shamelessly homophobic, transphobic, and sexist.” Rukayat was extremely frustrated as she described the structure of black student life on campus. “By their side are women who want to have these men’s approval, so they say things that are also transphobic, homophobic, and sexist.” She spoke with even more disdain in her voice as she described the women who she felt like enabled these men saying the following:

> There are these girls that fawn all over them. No, what is wrong with you. Or there are women at these vigils saying ‘we need to give more credit to our black men.’ I’m like, ugh, no we don’t.

> They get credit for everything. The Black Lives Matter movement is being credited to a man but it was made by a woman. They have enough credit for now. Even at the all women spaces you somehow still have to manage to talk about men. It's exhausting.

I probed Rukayat on why she thought this was happening, especially when there were fewer black men than women on campus. She said, "I just think even nationally the black community does like to have a focus on men. Like it's a maternal culture run by men, which makes no sense whatsoever. I feel like campus is just a continuation of that." The frustration that the women in my study felt about the praise and acceptance that black men got at their expense led them to feel even more isolated on campus.

Lacey provided another example of feeling unsupported by black men on campus. As an active member of campus sexual assault prevention organizations, she was frustrated by the lack of support she received from black fraternity members. She felt that these organizations, who pride themselves on scholarship and community service were in fact mostly self-serving. She described to me a conversation she had with one fraternity member about sexual assault at their parties wherein he said he has seen so much sexual assault that he is practically numb to it. Lacey recalled the following conversation with the fraternity member:

> What? How are you numb to sexual assault? And then I tried to calm down and said, "What do you mean, elaborate." So he's like, "We have parties all the time and that stuff just happens all the time, you know, guys they get too comfortable with females and basically we just stop it, nip it in the bud." But as he went on it was clear that the point of the nip-it-in-the-bud thing was so it wouldn't tarnish the fraternity's reputation.

Lacey sighed deeply as she recounted her conversation. She seemed very pained at this encounter and what it symbolized. She continued by saying:

> I just started going in! I'm like "Did you check on the girl to make sure the female was okay, why are you not having talks about this

> if this happens so often, why is this not a topic of discussion to bring awareness to young men and people on this campus about how to behave themselves at parties. The alcohol consumption is a problem, maybe removing it and talking about how people can control their limits and know their limits." I just went off!

Lacey was frustrated that these fraternity men positioned themselves as being pillars in the black campus community yet were seemingly unwilling or unable to do something that would help black women. As Lacey summed it up, "They're not really servicing the community. It's all talk. They're selfish."

Whereas other students were committed to black organizations for the social and professional benefits they provided, Commanders were insistent that they spend time only in organizations that align with their racial ideology, whether or not those organizations membership and purpose purported to do so. While one may assume that the Commanders would be the students most invested in the black community, in fact, these students laid bare some of the most scathing critiques of it. These women were frustrated by the gender dynamics and politics of these organizations, and lamented that they were not progressive and inclusive enough. Commanders were heavily involved in black peer groups and found certain spaces on campus that supported their blackness, but also found value in more integrated or predominantly white spaces.

"I Just Want Us to Be Great" – Choosing a Major

The Commanders intended career paths were also largely interpreted through their racial schemas. Compared to the other groups, these students were more likely to discuss explicitly helping black people when describing their future careers. When asked what was important to them in a major, helping improve the lives of black people was the most important factor for most of the Commanders. For example, Tori knew she wanted to major in Social Work, and

when I asked her what she wanted to do with this career path, she said, “I don’t know yet. All I know is, I want to do different things for women, well black women, really.” She continued by describing perhaps a career in school psychology, or working to improve black women’s reproductive health. Similarly, Jamila was interested in Organizational Studies, in part to focus on diversity efforts in companies. As she put it, “I guess ultimately I want to get a good job where I can feel like I’m having some kind of impact.”

The Commanders wanted the impact to be from the work itself, not from the money they could make or the example they could be to others in the community. Rukayat wants to be a clinical psychologist to help address the mental health of black and brown youth. “We just need more people who look like us, more people who can understand what we go through so more of us can have someone to talk to.” Amanda wanted to help the black community by being a civil rights lawyer. Megan wanted to help black women by being a mid-wife. Jade wanted to honor black culture by learning jazz. As she put it, “I just love watching black people groove to my music. I want to make us dance.” As Rukayat put it when discussing her career path, “I don’t know, it’s hard to imagine going into a job that doesn’t help my people in some way. We have so many problems we’re facing, so to just think about money or do something boring doesn’t make sense to me. I just want us to be great. So I feel like I have to a job that will help us be great.” If industries want to attract talented students like Rukayat to their fields, they must be able to demonstrate how persisting in this career path itself will help black people be great, above and beyond making the one black person more money.

In this way, the Commanders were the group most drawn to what Collins (1997) terms racialized careers. The Commanders has a higher percentage of those going into the Social Sciences and Humanities than the other two groups. None of these students planned on becoming

engineers, and for those considering a medicine or science career, the impetus was to do so as a way to help black women. This finding is in line with Beasley's (2011) results, yet adds additional nuance. In her study of black and white students at Stanford and the University of California-Berkeley, she found that black students most deeply embedded in the campus black community were more likely to pursue racialized jobs. Here, I find that the Commanders, students who do have a strong commitment to black people and a collectivist racial ideology, are more likely to pursue racialized careers. These students are not necessarily most integrated into the campus black community, as they have become disillusioned with it over time. This nuanced finding highlights the strength of an interview method. It is through understanding how they make meaning of the black community that we can delineate their racial worldview and how it matters for their thoughts on a career. These students might attend the same number of meetings of the same student organizations as other students, but how they interpret those actions is what differentiates and defines them.

Discussion

This centrality of their race meant that they found themselves often taking an adversarial stance. They were standing up to racial microaggressions in the moment. They were protecting black spaces on campus and actively seeking out black friends. They were thinking about instances of police brutality happening around the world. They were frustrated with black people who they did not feel were down enough for the cause. While this almost constant attention to their race gave them pride and a deep sense of meaning and achievement for their accomplishments, it also meant that they were often feeling exhausted, frustrated, overwhelmed, and overworked. These feelings are in part natural for college students, but it was not simply classes, relationships, and future plans that were stressing them out. By thinking about being

black all the time, they were opening up themselves to the negative implications of a heightened level of race related vigilance and the negative tolls of discrimination.

As the Commanders interpret what it means to be black as being in a constant state of attack, they place themselves at risk for the negative health effects associated with racial battle fatigue. As these students are consistently evaluating the motivations of their white peers, assessing whether or not a comment had an ulterior motive, or gearing their bodies and minds up for the fight, they are placing mental and emotional energy into discerning between which individual whites might be supportive and the destructive forces of white supremacy more broadly (Smith et al 2011). This study is not positioned to evaluate the actual psychological or physiological toll of racial battle fatigue on respondents, but the evidence presented here demonstrates that the Commanders, more than any other group, reported feeling stressed by the racial climate on campus, feeling exhausted or tired by trying to make it through the day as a black person in the racial minority, and mentioned the toll of dealing with racism in ways that no other respondents did.

These students seem to be aware of the concept of racial battle fatigue and were trying to cope with it, mostly by leaning on each other for support. However, they were disappointed when they found that not all black students shared their concerns and were not supportive of other black students in the ways that they deemed appropriate. This was then even more demoralizing for the Commanders, as their ideas about what makes a good black person were fairly rigid. The fact that other black people did not speak to them or support black people in the ways they thought were important meant they felt isolated by intra-racial and interracial encounters.

The Commanders commitment to their cultural schema even went so far as to shape their idea of a desirable career. As presented here, Commanders were sorting themselves into careers that made a direct impact on the lives of other black people. These women were not concerned with the potential earning potential, their ability to pay black student loans, or their own interests and talents as much as they were committed to doing work that would help improve the life chances of other black people. These students were not being pushed out of potentially high earning jobs, but rather did not see them as desirable as they were not seen as in line with their worldview. This is not to say that there are not people who share the Commanders ideology who work in Finance, but none of those people were present in this study. For these 9 women, being black shaped everything about their college experience, from who they were friends with, how they decided which organizations to be in, what to study, and what careers to pursue.

Adhering to the Commanders schema had its pros and cons for these students. They had a strong sense of pride and confidence as they moved through campus. They understood being black as a source of strength, culture, excellence, and joy. Despite what they perceived as nearly constant discrimination and structural racism, being black was fun. These respondents deeply loved black people and wanted to be loved by black people in return. They wanted to be spoken to in the halls, they wanted to be respected in clubs and organizations, and they wanted to work alongside other black people to make black life even better. They were disappointed that not all black people shared these commitments, and took these rejections personally at times.

For the Commanders, college was a battlefield. Their love for being black was the armor that shielded them from the slings and arrows of combat. Their past experiences prepared them for the fight. They saw each other as compatriots in the struggle for their humanity. The enemy

was not individual white people, but rather, larger systems of oppression. Together, they believed that could survive the battle and thrive in college.

CHAPTER V.
Redefining Black: Ambassadors Cultural Schema

When Anthony entered the lobby of his dorm room to meet with me, he offered a firm handshake, and apologized profusely for our mix-up in interview locations. He was wearing a t-shirt and jeans as he led me through the labyrinth of his dorm and into a lounge. The hallways were filled with signs saying, "Is your Halloween costume cultural appropriation?" with pictures and flowcharts describing costumes that may be inappropriate. He had tried to reserve a lounge for us to meet but was unable to do so, so we tried a series of doors before finding a space to talk. As he sat across from me, I was struck by his professionalism and the serious nature with which he carried himself. He spoke confidently and deliberately as he answered my question about where he was from with an elaborate history of his hometown's development. I asked him if all residents of his hometown know this history, and he cracked his first smile of the interview saying, "Probably not kids my age."

Anthony's thoughtful, serious demeanor carried throughout the interview. Anthony was clear and focused in his goals, yet aware of the challenges ahead of him. This clarity of purpose and drive to overcome difficulties extended beyond his career goals of becoming an industrial engineer. Anthony talked about being black in the same measured and focused way. He recognized the presence of racial discrimination and negative stereotypes that he would have to encounter, and he believed that if he worked hard enough and held himself to a high standard, he

could improve not only his life, but the lives of other black people. When discussing what it takes to get ahead as a black man in America, Anthony said, “I'm the kind of person who's like, if it's going to be hard, don't complain about it, just do it. Just push your head and do the work.”

In many ways, Anthony illustrates patterns common in this group of respondents. These students, which I have named Ambassadors, take a diplomatic approach to race relations. Much like real life ambassadors representing a foreign land, these students feel that the best way forward in our current racial landscape was to be positive black representatives, engaging in meaningful relationships across racial lines, being a model black citizen and being a delegate for their group working on behalf of other black people. For those who have adopted this cultural schema, being black was understood through an individualistic perspective. These respondents focused on the individual aspects of their personality that separate them from what they saw as the expectations of black people, they focused on the individual aspects of racism and believed that individual behavior can change race relations, and they also focused on the individual shortcomings of black people that have placed them in a negative position. These students take a peaceful, non-combative approach and are wary of extremes, always looking for compromise. Ambassadors focus on the power that individual people have to shape and reshape our racial landscape gave them a strong sense of agency.

In what follows, I demonstrate how these students’ interpretation of being black in some ways freed them from what they deem as negative expectations of blackness, but also confined them into a pressure to be positive representations. In order to do that, I will explore the elements of this groups racial identity. Specifically, I will focus on how race fits into how they saw themselves, or their self-concept. Next, I will discuss the meaning and utility they derive from their black racial identity. Finally, I will discuss how these respondents thought about race

relations and the challenges faced by black people. In each of these dimensions of their racial identity, Ambassadors interpreted being black as an individual project. This both motivated them towards success and gave them a sense that anything is possible, while also constraining them as they attempted to live up to their own high standards.

Ambassadors acknowledged that they are black, and accepted and embraced it as an important part of who they are. However, they focused on how their individual qualities are more important than their race, and strived to redefine being black through their achievements. This group believed that in order to achieve racial equality, black people in America must be fully integrated into mainstream society and not self-segregate, and were proud of themselves for their willingness and ability to do so. While they acknowledged that racism exists in America, they focused on interpersonal racism and discrimination rather than more systemic types of racism. By focusing on how individual people are the cause of racism, these respondents saw individual actions as the solution to these inequalities, namely through their personal achievement and representing black people in a positive light to non-black people. By being an envoy into the white world, they could change perceptions and thus society through their shining example of black excellence.

These 10 students come from a variety of backgrounds. 6 of them have roots in Detroit, while 3 are out of state college students and 1 is from elsewhere in the state. While most of these respondents are Black American, Evelyn is a first generation immigrant, Anthony is a second generation immigrant, and Lauren is a third generation immigrant. Dominique and Kiara are the only respondents not planning on a STEM career, as Dominique hopes to be a film director and Kiara a social scientist. The social class backgrounds of these respondents is also very varied. Evelyn and Anthony are the only two of this group to have both parents earn Bachelors' degrees

or above, with Evelyn's parents each earning several advanced degrees. Rebecca's mother earned a Bachelor's degree while her father did not, and Dominique's step-mother has an advanced degree, while neither of her biological parents completed any post-secondary education.

"Black By Happenstance" - Self-Concept

The Ambassadors schema is a way of filtering, viewing, understanding, and evaluating reality. A defining characteristic of this cultural schema is its positioning themselves as being more than just their racial identity. The Ambassadors acknowledged their blackness as an important part of their self-concept, but were quick to emphasize that it is not their defining characteristic. Blackness was an important part of who they were, but they refused to let it be all that they were, both to themselves, and to the world. While the Conscientious Objectors hesitated or struggled to articulate what they thought about being black, these respondents were clear that they were black and were proud that they were black. Their only hesitancy in response to this question came in their desire to elucidate their uniqueness and not lose themselves under a potentially all consuming racial blanket. The Ambassadors highlighted the ways in which they attempted to change other people's perceptions of what a black person was through their own unique attributes. Rebecca is the daughter of a retired teacher and a car salesman. She plans on majoring in Environmental Science. When I asked her what it means to her to be black she said:

> I see it as being a part of who I am, but it doesn't define me. I think that's the truth for me to say. I enjoy it, and I want to embrace it, but I don't want that to define who I am. I want to have other parts of me, my personality, my identity other than that but I still think that it is very important.

Ambassadors were aware that blackness was an important part of who they are and recognized the ways in which it is important to them. When asked what it means to be black, Anthony put it this way:

> For me, it's just another thing that I call myself. It's not a thing that I'm characterized by. I try to define it more than I let it define me. I'm trying to define black in a positive way more than I let it define who I am. I am more than just a black male. I am me, who happens to be black by happenstance. That's sort of how I look at it. Not a defining trait, but a trait.

Anthony's focus on putting blackness in a positive light highlights his knowledge of negative black stereotypes and his feeling that he does not reflect those. Aaron also felt that his blackness was very important to him, yet not his defining characteristic. When talking about how important his blackness was to how he sees himself, Aaron said "it's huge. It's not as huge as my religion. Being Christian is always first, but I think that it is second biggest." Aaron went on to acknowledge that he is still wrestling with how to make his blackness an asset to his life and the lives of others, and not a liability. He described it in this way:

> There are no mistakes. I was made a black man for a reason. I was made part of an oppressed group for a reason. And I'm constantly thinking about what that reason could be or what that means for my future and how it will shape me and how I will shape it….I think about [being black] as a test that is facing me.

Aaron's belief in his ability to shape what blackness means is indicative of an Ambassador. This quote speaks to both their awareness of racial discrimination and oppression, and also his optimism and strong belief in individualism as a way to counteract any negative consequences of being black on their lives. These respondents desired to craft a black racial identity wherein their blackness was not always the most salient trait, or the organizing principle of their lives. They sought to live in a world in which black Americans were meaningfully integrated within society, and blackness was not the most important factor in the way in which one experienced the world.

Or as Lauren, a first-generation college student from New Jersey, succinctly put it, “It is important to me, being black is the greatest thing ever, but that’s not all I am.”

For Ambassadors, blackness was one important component of their racial identity. Unlike Conscientious Objectors, they did not shy away from labeling themselves as black or acknowledging the ways in which it mattered to their lived experience. However unlike Commanders, they did not feel as if it was the most important or most interesting thing about themselves. They were proud to be black and happy to be black, just as they were proud of other elements of their social identities. For the most part, these respondents described themselves as being comfortable in their blackness, just as they were comfortable with other parts of themselves. As they see themselves as individuals first, they did not identify any essential characteristics of blackness or see blackness as inherently having any role in their personality.

Excellence is the Only Option - Meaning

Ambassadors understood their blackness as a motivating force that requires them to carry themselves in a way that counteracts negative stereotypes. In this interpretation, their individual behavior is seen as a powerful tool for social change, as long as they carry themselves well and achieve. This gives the respondents a strong sense of agency, as they believe they have the power to create social change, but it also constrains them as they feel that change is dependent on their success. For these respondents, to be black in the world is to grapple with negative assumptions about you, and they felt it necessary to change these perceptions through their actions. For example, when Brittany told me about what it means to be black, she said, “For me on a daily basis it's to break out some stereotypes and to show people that I'm a black person, I'm great, I'm smart, I'm beautiful, I'm all these things that people try to say that black people are not.” This reflects an acknowledgment of pervasive negative perceptions of blackness.

Echoing other respondents, Brittany defined her blackness as changing the perception of other people in what she initially characterized as a daily fight against stereotypes. However, after further consideration, she recognized that she does not necessarily daily battle against stereotypes, but rather uses the knowledge of people's low expectations for black people to fuel her drive towards success. Brittany went on to say:

> It's that I want to one day be one of the people who make black history. When February comes in 2035 I'll be spoken about in high schools and middle schools and they'll say she was this and she did that and she was an African-American person and she's great and respected and things like that.

The drive to be respected and to represent is characteristic of this group of respondents. When Dominique told me about her adjustment to campus life, she mentioned the low number of black people present on campus as putting pressure on her "to represent the black community." This pressure to represent leads to careful management of public identities (Lacy 2007). She went on to say:

> I always make sure, well I try to make sure, that I'm early or that I'm on time. That I dress appropriately to where I'm going. When I'm around different people I don't act out. I feel like it's very prominent when I'm here. I feel like I have to act appropriately at all times because you don't know who's watching, you don't know who has an opinion.

Scholars have termed Dominique's actions as "racism-related vigilance" (Hicken et al, 2013; Clark, Benkert et al. 2006; Feagin and Sikes 1994) a term used to refer to the ways in which Black Americans prepared for the possibility of future experiences of discrimination. In Dominique's few weeks on campus at the time of this interview, she has learned this skill and sees the need for vigilance as being an inherent part of being black. Signaling competence is a demonstrated tactic for deterring stereotypes (Lamont and Fleming 2005). As Lacy (2007)

argues, black middle class adults manage their public identities to signal their middle class status. For the Ambassadors, managing public identities was incredibly important. These respondents discussed managing their public selves more than any other group.

Anthony also reported the need to be intentional about his actions in public spaces because of his race. When describing what being black means to him, Anthony said, "I am certain things and people think certain ways about those things that I am, so I have to do something to change that. For me, it's almost like the background goal of everything I'm doing. 'How does this help me be perceived better and other people like me be perceived better by this group of people?'' Anthony allows his blackness to drive his experience in multiple aspects of his life, using this question of "how will this help black people" as a way to help him make decisions.

While other students also acknowledged the presence of negative stereotypes, what unites this group is the need to disprove them to change the way in which black people are viewed by whites. This focus on the white gaze characterizes this group. Dominique explained this pressure she feels in this way:

> It's tiring, but then it's also empowering because when I have meetings with people and I'm there early, get there before them, I'm dressed appropriately, and I talk different than they do. And they say, "oh, she's good for a black person." It's empowering but it's also exhausting when you just want to be with your friends and relax and let loose like they get to but you can't because you're black, so it's looked at differently.

This tension between feeling empowered and exhausted is illuminating in how the Ambassadors see the world. Empowered by their agency, and exhausted by their quest for perfection, Dominique and others in this group worked diligently to live in a way that defied stereotypes. This group acknowledged the existence of negative assumptions of black people, and used their

blackness as motivation to achieve their personal and professional goals. This question Anthony articulated, of "how does this help black people" represents a key component of the Ambassador schema. Tying individual actions, things that may seem as simple as where they sit in class, whether or not they smile in line in the cafeteria, and how loud they speak in a library to a much larger sense of racial duty and obligation. As an Ambassador, each choice was received by the public and filtered through a racial lens. They were representing the black delegation on a large scale, and they took this responsibility seriously.

The Ambassadors management of their public identities also was filtered through a gendered lens. The Ambassadors were aware of the controlling images associated with them as men and women, and sought to change potentially negative public opinions through their behaviors.

The Ambassador women were very aware of the image of the "angry black woman" and they tried to avoid this stigmatization. For these women, being loud, being angry, or being aggressive only reinforced the negative stereotypes and worked against their cause to uplift the status of black Americans through their positive example. Jasmine described this constrained feeling when she described being loud with her friends in public.

> I want to be goofy and let loose sometimes, but then is it wrong to be goofy and loud just because I'm a black girl? You can have a goofy and loud white person acting crazy in the union and nobody will think anything of it but you have a group of people being loud, acting goofy and then people are looking at you like you're disruptive. It's tiring to always have to, you don't get the privilege to just let loose in public.

In Chapter 3 I presented Lacey, a Commander, describing a similar scene. Yet the two women are making sense of it in very different ways. For Lacey, the fact that people were judging the black girls for being loud in public gave her reason to laugh even louder, even though there may

be negative consequences for being perceived as loud. For Jasmine, to be loud in public was a negative reflection of black people and went against her goal of refuting stereotypes through her behavior. This constraint to be not seen as loud, aggressive, or angry, made Jasmine afraid to be joyous in public.

The male Ambassadors were also dealing with controlling images, namely of them as angry and aggressive. When Anthony discussed what it means to be black on campus, he immediately connected his race and gender and invoked the idea of the angry black man. He recognized the unique pressure on him as a black man, interpreting the stereotypes black people face through a gendered lens.

> Being a Black man, there are certain things that come along with being a black man. You know, the angry black man thing. You can't get upset certain times, just because people think, "Why are you angry?" even if you're not angry. You have to kind of keep yourself in check with that, but that just comes with sort of being aware.

Anthony saw the angry black man trope as something that would simply "come along with being a black man." This highlights how inextricable he felt discrimination would be from blackness. This quote also highlights the way in which Anthony felt that his ability to express emotions was constrained by the fact that he is a black male.

Likewise, Aaron also saw the need to keep his emotions in check as part and parcel of being a black man. He too was hyper aware of not being perceived as angry as it would hinder his ability to connect with people across racial lines and receive equal treatment.

"I always think about how people look at me funny because I'm black. I always think about that. I'm aware of the fact that I have different faces. Like I'm aware of the fact that in some environments I talk slower, I don't raise my voice, I just talk differently to calm people down."

Aaron's strategy to modulate his voice to "calm people down" is an action he is taking in response to how he makes sense of the stereotype of black men as aggressive. As an Ambassador, he has determined that the best way to combat the presence of negative stereotypes is to refute them with his actions.

In addition to changing his voice so that people did not think he was angry, Aaron sought to tap into another commonly held belief about black men—-that they are fun and cool. Aaron continued relaying his tactics to change people's perceptions of him by saying, "Or sometimes I might be more silly or humorous or tell jokes to calm people down and make them feel good about me. People seem to really like that." Aaron was able to tap into these perceptions of black men as cool and funny to assuage any negative repercussions he might be facing for being seen as angry.

In these students' quest for excellence, higher education was a key component. These students believed that attending and completing college was key for black Americans to improve their public perception, and thus their treatment. College was seen as the ideal path to social mobility, and to not attend college was not just a personal choice, but one that could negatively impact the perception of the entire race. Lauren describes college as "a way to shake the stigma." She went on to acknowledge that the pressure on black people to do so may be unfair, but she thought it necessary. Lauren said, "It is important to try to show people like, look, this is what we can do. We shouldn't have to prove ourselves to you, but I'm just as smart as you are, and I made it here." LeNae echoed these sentiments when she said, "we're stereotyped all the time, that we don't go to college, or that we're stupid, or lazy. I think it is important of us to prove it wrong basically. I think [going to college] is important, because we're always being told that we can't, and we need to show that we can."

These students see an unwillingness to apply as the main barrier for black students attending elite schools or college altogether. The Ambassadors value a willingness to "put yourself out there" and value trailblazing and being the first to achieve historic barriers. This worldview extends to their thoughts about going to elite schools. Brittany told me that the main reason there were few black people at elite universities was because they do not apply. When I asked Lauren about the low number of black students enrolled at her university, she stressed that black students do not apply because they do not feel like they are capable of succeeding academically or socially.

> I feel like a lot of them feel like they wouldn't make the cut. Or once they got here they wouldn't fit in, and they have no business being in a place like that.... I feel like a lot of people probably don't want to go to these elite colleges and put themselves in a situation where they might have to deal with racism and they don't think they could make it in an environment like that.

While Commanders highlighted the structural barriers to entry for black students to elite spaces, or discussed the racial biases present in the institutions themselves, the Ambassadors highlighted the need for black students to be willing to be made uncomfortable at these schools. Once again, placing the onus on individuals. The Conscientious Objectors were most likely to highlight the cultural deficits present in black families, saying that black students do not value education enough to be prepared for and apply to selective schools.

The Ambassadors are high academic achievers and are motivated by their black racial identity to continue to achieve more. However, the pressure they put on themselves to achieve as a way to change ideas about what black people can do, is not without its consequences. This hyper-awareness of negative stereotypes puts these respondents at risk for the ill effects of stereotype threat. Claude Steele, who originally developed the concept (1988a, 1988b) argues

that the potential for stereotype threat arises whenever (1) a negative stereotype exists about a social group; (2) members of that social group are aware of the stereotype; and (3) group members are required to perform in a domain where the stereotype is relevant. This concept has been extensively studied in the sociological and psychological literature and validated in and out of lab settings. While this particular study is not positioned to evaluate the existence of stereotype threat for respondents, as I do not have access to students' academic performance, the Ambassador responses do indicate a susceptibility towards the externalization pathway by which stereotype threat can manifest. The externalization pathway occurs when black students expect others, particularly white students and teachers to hold negative stereotypes about black student performance and to make negative judgments based on these prejudices, then feel anxious about performing negatively in front of this white audience (Massey and Owens 2014). In Massey et al's (2003) study of students in elite schools found significant evidence for stereotype threat, specifically that minority students who doubted their own ability and were sensitive to the views of others earned significantly lower grades than other students. The pressure Ambassadors placed on themselves suggests that they would be at risk for these negative effects.

Ambassadors were constantly aware of the negative perceptions of black Americans and determined to overcome them through individual interactions and achievement. By being positive representatives of blackness, they felt that they could improve not only their own lives but those of other black people. While Commanders strove to do this through inspiring and uplifting other black people, and working alongside them for structural change, for Ambassadors, this was to occur through changing the perceptions of individual white people. This is indicative of their individual perspective on race, in that for them individual actions have the power to shape race relations. Whereas those Commander**s** rejected the idea that because

they were black they needed to behave in a way that was palatable and acceptable to white America, Ambassadors accepted the premise and felt that it was their behavior that needed to adapt to the constraints placed on them by what they saw as unfair stereotypes, rather than to upend the system that produced the stereotypes themselves.

"I'm Not Afraid to Be Around People Not Like Me" - Ideology

For the Ambassadors, the appropriate way forward for black people was to be fully integrated into white society, while still retaining cultural ties. In this way, they advocated for black people to engage in strategic assimilation (Lacy 2007). While respondents in all three groups mentioned HBCUs in order to draw distinctions in their college experience, Ambassadors pointed at their decision to not attend them as a point of pride and a signal of their virtue. LeNae provides an important example of defining oneself positively based on a willingness to engage with whites. When we talked about her college search and her decision of what schools to apply for, she reported that a desire to be in a place that would prepare her for the "real world" drove her decision. She says:

> Some people are uncomfortable being around so many people that's not like them. Me personally, I'm not afraid to be around people that's not like me, which is kind of why I came here, because I did not want to be in a setting with all African-American people.

LeNae saw her ability to be in integrated spaces as a sort of moral virtue and a testament to her evolvement. She spoke with a touch of disdain in her voice when she discussed those who "limit themselves" by attending historically black colleges and universities. LeNae doubled down on this later in the interview, when she made the case that black people who do not open themselves

to white spaces and white people are "ignorant to the world." I asked her what she meant by that and she told me the following:

> They don't realize how big the world is. Black people just feel like they hate white people because of the way white people treated us. To be honest, white people are everywhere and when you're getting a job or whatever, it's mostly them. You cannot hate them because, to be honest, I don't want to say you'll be working for them, but you'll be working with them, You'll be working around them. You can't hate them, you can't be ignorant towards them because you have to encounter them some time in your life to make it in life.

LeNae was visibly frustrated as she relayed this response. She highlighted the importance of black Americans being willing to spend time with white Americans and the necessity of these encounters for professional and personal advancement.

Jasmine is the daughter of a budget analyst and was raised outside of Detroit. When we discussed her initial thoughts on college, she mentioned that in the 6th grade she wanted to go to Howard University (an HBCU). She laughed and shook her head when she said it, saying "I remember before I actually looked into colleges, I would say what I thought was nice. I said Howard, I did not know much about Howard and I didn't even really want to go to an HBCU but I was in sixth grade, I was just talking." As the interview continued, she went on to reinforce this point numerous times. As we discussed her time on campus thus far, she said:

> That's another reason why I did not want to go to an HBCU. I felt like I could educate as many of the white people or people outside my race that I could come in contact with. Just making them more aware of what is offensive to our culture and our race.

Jasmine saw her presence in a predominantly white space as a form of activism, allowing her to change perceptions of blacks as a group through her presence and willingness to have conversations. LeNae, Lauren, and Jasmine exemplify the ideology of advancement through

integration. However, these respondents had not yet found that racial utopia they sought. But in their mind, that failing was not due to a lack of a willing spirit.

Aware but Optimistic - Racism

Ambassadors were aware of negative stereotypes and racial inequalities facing black people in America, yet remained optimistic that race relations were in fact improving. While the Commanders focused on the structural barriers or institutional racism that black people face, these respondents focused on the interpersonal racism and pervasive stereotypes that they perceived as being rampant. They also focused on the behavior of black Americans as an explanation for the inequality they faced. They believed that their generation, including people like themselves, would be part of a change that improved black life in this country. For example, when talking with Anthony about the future of race in America, he believed that his generation would improve race relations.

> I think every generation gets less and less hung up on those kinds of things, which is good insofar as it doesn't become, hopefully certain stereotypes and things disappear as time goes on. My generation I think has done a better job than the ones previous.

Evelyn also was optimistic about the future of race relations. Like many other Ambassadors, she saw the improvement of race relations in America resting on changing individual attitudes and keeping an open mind about white people. This came out in her discussion of the Black Lives Matter Movement. Evelyn described the movement as such:

> The movement I think is a great way to show to other people, other races, what being black in America is all about. Making other people realize what they are doing to black people. The movement is strong in helping us move forward as a nation, but I think a problem that is still there is black people blaming a lot of things that happen to white people. I think in the process of moving forward is everyone working together to move forward. You can't just put the blame on one person. Even though it may seem that one person was

> the reason of it all, there's two sides to every story. I guess you have to work together to move forward.

Her reluctance to blame white people and to see white people in an adversarial context is indicative of the Ambassador worldview. She sees the strength of the movement in its ability to raise awareness among whites and show them the realities of black life, not as a tool for changing the structures that lead to these issues of police brutality. Evelyn, and other Ambassadors see racial progress as being possible only through working together and gaining white allies, not by alienating them.

This focus on the individual rather than structural level explanations for inequality extends to their understanding of black Americans as well. These Ambassadors felt like the thing that stood in the way of black achievement was black Americans themselves. Namely, their "mindset" or "mentality." When describing the state of black Americans and the problems we face, Dominique immediately pegged the "mindset" as the biggest obstacle.

> I was always surrounded by people who wanted to do better for themselves. When I started to get older and started to venture out towards the other people in my community and seeing that they didn't have that same want for themselves that I wanted for myself. I kind of was disappointed. You don't want to get a better job than McDonald's? You're okay with just smoking weed everyday and chilling in the house, chilling in your mom's house? We have a long way to go and I feel like it's going to take a very long time.

Aaron felt that the biggest issue facing black Americans was a lack of role models, or one could say, ambassadors. He sighed deeply as he told me that "there is a lack of figures. There's no big person to look to, you know, saying 'here's what a successful black person could be.'" This lack of role models was a gap that these respondents sought to fill. Their presence in college and persistence in white spaces was largely tied to their desire to create a positive impact on black life by changing the perceptions of whites and inspiring black youth.

While some of these respondents did see structural levels of racism, their understanding of their racial identity, themselves and their achievement allowed them to conclude that their own success meant that structural barriers were largely overblown. If they could achieve, anyone could. If individual actions had the power to change the plight of blacks in America, then just as their individual choices and accomplishments were a step toward equality, so were other people's choices steps toward inequality.

Becoming Ambassadors

This group is comprised of students from all class backgrounds, a variety of majors, and a variety of family structures. Despite this variation in background, they came to understand their race similarly. A key theme for the Ambassadors is their reluctance to see the world in the same stark racial terms as their families. Whereas their families tried to prepare them for discrimination they may face in the world, these students largely rejected this advice before attending college and thought their families claims about racism must be largely overstated. While parental racial socialization plays a large role in the development of how individuals come to understand their racial identity, the Ambassadors stand out for their challenging of these lessons.

Jasmine described her father as "one of those people who hates white people." She rolled her eyes while talking about how he sees all white people as racist. She sighed as she vented to me, "it's so annoying and I did not want to be like him. I thought there have to be people who support us, there have to be people who aren't like what my dad thinks of the average white kid." Jasmine acknowledged that her father's advice comes from his own experiences with discrimination, but felt like his position was far too extreme.

Aaron also came from a family that he thought had too extreme of views about race. He told me "I disagree with my sister a lot, cause she's like 'all white people are racist, that's just what it is. They don't all know that they're racist, but they're all racist." Aaron sounded embarrassed as he told me what his sister believes. "My dad is also like that, he shares that same kinda talk back and forth with my sister and they used to try and convince me. 'White people are all racist, it just is what is'," Aaron told me while shaking his head. He paused for a while and spoke carefully, clearly thinking through his thoughts on the subject as he told me:

> I disagree with that. I think I'm more like, no, all white people aren't racist, but all white people are in a position that is different from black people. And some people are willing to accept that or understand it and then work to change it. Then some people are like, "well it is what it is." Right? So, I think I would just word it like that. They aren't marginalized in the same way.

Aaron paused often during carefully considered response. He was rejecting his family's worldview that he saw as more pessimistic to create his own vision of the world that leaves space for individual action to improve relations.

Some of the Ambassadors rejection of their parents' racial attitudes comes from being ensconced in majority black schools and neighborhoods, wherein they did not have many interracial encounters. As such, they did not feel the need to discuss race or racism. When I asked LeNae if her parents talked to her about being black, she smirked as she answered saying, "No I've never literally had to talk about what it means to be Black. I've always known. Just act the way I act." Jasmine responded similarly, saying, "No, it's just who we are. It's not something you need to talk about." These respondents reported that their time in mostly black environments rendered discussions about race unnecessary. However, as that context shifted, their conversations about race adjusted as well.

For example, Brittany said the following:

> Before I came to college not at all, they never had to [talk about being black] because I was always around more black people. When I went to high school there were white people there, there were more black people and I've always been comfortable because I mean, we're from the same place, we're all black, we get the same things.

For Brittany, like many other respondents, in her adolescence, race was something that went without explanation or discussion. However, after enrolling in college, she saw a shift in the conversations she had with her mother about race.

> When I got to college my mom really didn't talk to me about being black but she asked me how it felt because she knew that the black population here was so small. She was like "are you getting along okay, have you ran into any issues, have you been discriminated against anywhere, anything like that? That was about it, she didn't have to explain that I should be proud of who I am because she knew that I was.

Brittany's mother did not have first-hand experience with being a racial minority in college, but she was aware that was something her child was now facing. Brittany saw her mother as talking about race in a new way now that it was more necessary and that her blackness had taken new meaning in this new context.

Like Brittany, discussions about race increased for Dominique as well as she approached college. Her step-mother and grandfather were the only ones in her family to complete college, so they talked to her more about the experience and what to expect when she was in the racial minority for the first time in her life. In high school, when she was in the racial majority, Dominique reasoned that her family never felt it necessary to talk about what it means to be black:

> Not really, more so my step-mom did, and not even growing up but when I was in high school. She was the one that would sit me

> down, and talk about how when I went to college I would have to represent the black community well because of the way we were viewed. She talked to me about that but besides that not really. I don't think it was really prevalent because of where I lived. It wasn't like, 'oh I have to talk to you about being black' because we're surrounded by black people. As I was getting ready to leave people would talk about it more.

In this, these respondents highlight the importance of context for racial socialization and racial identity development. They acknowledge that because of their context, being black was not seen as anything in need of explanation. In part, this also highlights their understanding of race as being about racism, and not about race itself. Whereas the Commanders attributed specific qualities to their race and saw value in learning about the history and culture tied to blackness, these respondents felt it was self-evident. These respondents did not find blackness necessary for discussion outside of the context of racism — if surrounded by black people what was there to talk about? Being black was simply being. It was nothing to be ashamed of or embarrassed of, but also nothing necessitating deep and thoughtful exploration with family members and peers. Only when sustained interactions with white people were on the table did these respondents feel it necessary to talk about race. These respondents were defining racism as being about interpersonal racism, therefore if there were no white people, there was no racism.

However, not all Ambassadors grew up in racially homogeneous environments. Evelyn grew up in a predominantly white affluent suburb, while Anthony and Lauren grew up in integrated environments. Even still, these respondents came to understand their race similarly to the Ambassadors who grew up in majority black environments. These Ambassadors did not as strongly reject their parents' attempts at racial socialization, as they had first hand experiences with non-black people that helped them see how it was important to learn about how to deal with potentially contentious situations. In this way, social class explanations do not fit neatly along

the lines of these cultural schema. However, we can see how class matters for attracting students to one particular expression of their racial identity.

Discussion

In the above pages, I have described the racial worldview of those I have named Ambassadors. This group of respondents position themselves as racial envoys to both the black and white worlds, serving as examples of what is possible. They believe that the best way to achieve racial harmony and progress is to be open to integration and to seek white friendships and peer networks. They take pride in their blackness and see it as a central part of their identity, but believe that through their personal achievements and individual traits, they can open the blinds they see enclosing people's expectations of black bodies — they can shine light on what they see as the positive aspects of blackness. Drawing from this cultural schema means that these respondents are aware of negative stereotypes and negative connotations of blackness, but interpret them as opportunities for social change.

The Ambassadors come from a variety of class backgrounds and upbringings, yet came to the same cultural schema. The individualistic perspective on race relations is publicly available, and closely matches onto larger American ideals of meritocracy, individualism, and the American dream. Scholars have identified that middle class black Americans have an increasing belief that both individual motivations and structural barriers are to blame for racial inequality (Hunt 2004). Explanations for the move for more middle class black Americans to placing emphasis on individual explanations of inequality include the expansion of the black middle class (Hunt 2004) and the election of President Barack Obama, a demonstration that anything is possible in America (Welburn and Pittman 2012). However, these Ambassadors are not all middle class, and they are espousing these views at the time of Donald Trump's election to

office. These students have access to the publicly available schemas of individualism and meritocracy, and are able to apply them to their college setting.

In many ways, the Ambassadors put forth ideas in line with what some deem as "respectability politics." Respectability politics refers to a dogma that describes respectability as a middle-class creed tied to elite white and western standards for behavior (Mosse 1985). In this line of thinking, a black person's respectability is based on their ability to distance themselves from the elements of black culture that are sanctioned by whites (Kerrison et al 2018; Patillo 2007). The Ambassadors believed that if they carried themselves well, if they acted according to middle class white norms and standards, especially in public or in integrated spaces, they could reap social and material benefits for themselves and then in turn for black people as a group. In this way, Ambassadors were hyper aware of stereotypes and the way in which they were perceived by others.

One could argue that this awareness manifests itself into a pressure to be perfect, a pressure to perform, a pressure to use every simple interaction as an opportunity to prove white people wrong. While these respondents argue that they are "more than just black" and want to "redefine blackness" this pressure to be perfect and use every interaction as a chance to advance the race means that their blackness ends up dictating many of their choices, even as they profess it does not. These respondents are eager to loosen the grip of what they see as negative expectations of black people, but in their wrestling with these expectations, at times find themselves tangled up in them even more. Being black was to them a simple fact of life, but one that carried burdens, responsibilities and pressure. These young people are extremely high achievers, driven to attend a prestigious university and pursue lucrative careers. Their interviews suggest that their commitment to being positive ambassadors of black life had driven them to

achieve these things. As I will discuss in further chapters, this matters greatly for how they understand the purpose of college and navigate the space. These respondents are committed to being positive representations of the race in the world, drawing a distinction between themselves and those who they believe are not doing so.

CHAPTER VI.
Building a Legacy: Ambassadors on Campus

In the previous chapter, I explored how the Ambassadors understand what it means to be black. In this chapter, I focus on how this schema plays out on the college campus as these students navigate their college experience. As with the Commanders, I will explore how these students make sense of and prioritize their friendships and campus involvement. I will also look closely at how they think about major selection and career choice. I find that the Ambassadors' desire to defy stereotypes and change the perception of black people means that they see value in seeking non-black friendships while also maintaining strong ties to the campus black community. The Ambassadors also prioritize breaking barriers professionally, and pride themselves on their willingness to take on difficult careers which give them the opportunity to serve as role models for younger black students. In these ways, the Ambassadors cultural schema shapes the way these students move through the university.

"I Can Be Friends with Anybody if I Wanted To" - Friendships

Ambassadors believed that black people should spend time in integrated organizations and peer networks. They saw this as a strategy for both their own professional and social advancement as well as an important part of eliminating racism and discrimination. Even if objectively these respondents divided their time with black and white people the exact same way as other respondents, what separated them was the way in which they thought about their time in

these spaces. These students saw their willingness to engage in integrated spaces as a positive reflection on themselves as people, drawing a contrast between themselves and other black people, who they saw as inferior for "needing" to be in black spaces. This was an important moral boundary for these respondents, as they saw good black people as those who could and would extend themselves to others. In this way, the Ambassadors were engaging their own form of "strategic assimilation" (Lacy 2007) in that the black world was still seen as a primary site for socializing, and being comfortable in the white world was seen as necessary for personal and professional advancement. In what follows I will discuss the Ambassadors attitudes towards friendships and peer networks, and the meaning they derive from their choices.

Lauren, a first-generation college student from New Jersey, strongly believes that in order to change the negative perception of blacks in America, they must be fully integrated into mainstream American society. She said, "You shouldn't just keep separating yourself, because it's not going to change people's view of you if you keep separating yourself from them." Lauren went on to discuss how this affects her desire to participate on campus, saying the following:

> I think a lot of the problems with stuff like that is like, I mean they're allowing segregation, you know? Segregating themselves, because it is more comfortable to be around black people a lot of times, because being with people like you is always more comfortable. That shouldn't be what you're satisfied with, just being with people just like you, if you want to be equal.

Lauren positions integration as important for equality and places the onus on black people to extend beyond their comfort zone if they are desiring of equality, and does not place that same responsibility on white people.

Evelyn's friend circle in some ways represents a manifestation of what respondents discussed as the ideal of attending a predominantly white college. Evelyn describes her friend

group as being very diverse with people having ancestors from all across the world. Evelyn smiled wistfully as she told me of the moment that she had realized her dream of having meaningful relationships across racial lines.

> I guess yesterday we all decided to go outside and play soccer and enjoy the sun for a bit. We sat down on the grass for a little bit and someone said, 'You guys look at us! We're all sitting down together a multi ethnic group of friends'. At that moment when I was sitting with them I realized this was the right choice for me because I'm able to find people who are similar to me but yet different in such a large university. They're able to understand what I've gone through, what I'm going through and vice versa. We're still able to learn a lot from each as well. I feel like we're changing each other's lives for the better and I wish the whole world was willing to experience this.

For Evelyn, this was a moment in which she realized that had made the right choice in colleges, and also reflected her desire for the world to look more like her friend group. Evelyn and others in this category speak of full integration into mainstream society as not just a personal choice, but the way in which all black Americans should behave in order to achieve a goal of racial uplift.

Not all respondents were able to have the friend circle like the one Evelyn described, but they saw themselves positively for their willingness to strive towards it. The perceived ability to make friends with anyone was seen as a point of pride for this group. LeNae told me that she was easily able to make friends with people across racial and class lines, saying: "Being around different races doesn't bother me. I can connect, I can be friends with anybody if I wanted to. I guess it is a bit harder to make friends as easily because [non-black people] don't make an effort. It's not a bad adjustment, but a bit of an adjustment."

When I asked Brittany, a first-generation college student whose mother works in retail, about making cross-racial friends on campus, she told me the following:

> I've been able to do that, but like I said I'm a social person and I like to try to meet new people from different backgrounds because there's different parts of me as a person. I obviously relate with black people because I'm black, I grew up with a black mother and things like that but I can also relate to other people because I have so many interests and different things outside of that.

Here Brittany is describing her own social preferences and social abilities, along with framing blackness as one of many other parts of her identity and not necessarily the most salient one. However, she went on to indicate that this is more than a belief of how she should act, but rather a deeper held ideology of how black Americans as a group should approach interracial friendships and relationships. Brittany continued by saying:

> There's so many people who can't [relate to people outside their race], that's the thing. I can, but there's a lot of people who can't. When they hear people talk about their lake house with their dad, they get offended a little. They're like 'why are you talking about that, I don't know about that, I don't really care about that,' but not me. I'll listen. I can't relate because I don't have a lake house, but I'll listen. The story sounds cool, sounds like you had a lot of fun at your lake house.

In this quote Brittany seemingly conflates race with class. She seamlessly moves from a discussion of having black friends to having friends with a lake house, drawing a distinction between the two. This is illustrative of how Brittany's class position is informing her thoughts about race. This evidence highlights the key theme for the Ambassadors. The desire and ability to create and sustain cross-racial ties was seen as a sign of virtue. They drew this moral boundary against those black Americans who they saw as too exclusionary and too concerned with race.

Ambassadors prided themselves in their ability to diffuse potentially tense racial situations, and to help others learn. This differentiates Ambassadors from Commanders, who take a more confrontational approach. Anthony often found himself in positions where white students would ask him questions about the latest music, sports, and popular culture, and he

thought that people assumed he would be knowledgeable about these subjects because of his race. As is indicative of the Ambassadors, he saw those moments as an opportunity to teach other people about, race, racism and why other people might find their comments offensive, even if he did not see them as such. Anthony told me the following story as an example of his cool demeanor being able to head off a situation that other people may have found offensive.

> I have a rather tall black friend. I once heard someone say to him 'Oh, you must be real good at basketball.' And I know he meant it as a compliment of 'you must be a good basketball player' but I know that other people read it as you saying 'Oh because I'm a tall black person I must only be good for sports and you think I got to college on sports.' But I knew that wasn't what he meant so I just stepped in and made a joke of it and talked about how in fact my friend does play basketball, but is nowhere near good enough to play in college. Something like that. I just try and help people laugh it off but hopefully learn something in the process.

Anthony's Ambassador worldview helped him interpret things that other black people would have seen as offensive microaggressions into moments for him to be a positive representation of black people and change individual's minds by teaching them. Whereas a Commander may have confronted the person, or a Conscientious Objector may have rationalized it as a reasonable question to ask of a tall man, Anthony knew that it could be racially insensitive and took it upon himself to diffuse the situation. Anthony recounted stories of his friends asking him for permission to say the N-word around him or to sing it in a song. "I just tell them, I'm not going to tell you what to say, but some people won't like it if you say that word. You can't say it to me or about me, but if you're singing a song, that's between you and whoever you're around." Anthony positioned these experiences as innocent mistakes by people who did not know much about race.

> It can kind of be annoying but I don't think those are necessarily about race. I think it's because I'm mostly around engineers and

> there is a certain aloofness about the whole thing. Race just isn't in the forefront of their mind at the time and they just say things. But the fact that I'm black is close to the front of my mind basically most of the time. They have the privilege of being able to not think about that all the time. And that's great. I don't begrudge them for that. So I just try and be chill and understand where they are coming from and be their friend and laugh and joke with them and then maybe they will actually learn something.

Here Anthony is leveraging his position as their "cool" friend to help him teach other people and have these one-on-one relationships. He acknowledges that not everyone has the instinct or ability to diffuse situations, and values that ability in himself.

While these students believed in the importance of integration, that is not to say they did not value and seek black spaces and friendships as well. The Ambassadors stance on getting the social and professional benefits of the white world while also retaining close ties to the black social world most closely mirrors Karyn Lacy's concept of strategic assimilation. In her (2007) study of black middle class families, she found that some parents were engaging in strategic assimilation, or living among the white world but privileging the black world for socializing and positive identity development for their children. While the respondents in this study have all chosen to attend a predominantly white university, they all have fulfilled parts of this definition. However, it is the Ambassadors who interpret white spaces as valuable for professional advancement and black spaces as valuable for social relationships. They framed their willingness to be around white people as evidence of their commitment to an egalitarian ideology in which their friendships with non-black people would improve race relations. This desire for meaningful intra-racial relationships was not without tension and at some points contradiction with which the students themselves were still wrestling. They enjoyed being around black people, and often saw black relationships and friendships as an important part of their development, but were hesitant

to overly rely on black peers and not as they saw it "take full advantage" of being at a predominantly white university.

Rebecca exemplifies this tension as she expressed an ideology that a "good" black person is one who integrates into white spaces, with her familiarity and comfort around black people. I interviewed her on a Sunday afternoon, right after she was dropped off from church. We met in the lobby of her dorm and as we walked through the building to a lounge on her floor, she told me about service that day, as she was trying out a new church. She said that her mother encouraged her to find a predominantly black church to attend, so she tried it out this particular Sunday. In the interview she said that her initial instinct was to not go to a black church, but rather a predominately white one. Rebecca said of going to a mostly white church, "I was like oh, we're all people and I don't want to just get to know black people, I want to know all people." However, she heeded her mother's instructions and went to the black church after a few Sundays at the mostly white one. Rebecca impersonated her mother in voice and posture while saying the following, "She said you should always make sure you have friends or you have people who look out for you in your own community."

Rebecca sighed and rolled her eyes while continuing, "I don't know. Yeah, she wanted me to get to know people. She said *my* people, but you know…" Rebecca gave me a knowing glance as she trailed off and did not complete her sentence. Her mother was encouraging her to see black people as "her people" and Rebecca looked somewhat embarrassed and conflicted as she relayed this story to me. Rebecca looked at me as a fellow black woman as if I would understand what she meant when she said told me her mother said she should get to know "my people." I interpreted Rebecca's conflict as evidence of her own desire to branch out from her primarily black upbringing, wherein she went to mostly black schools (and churches) and try

something new by integrating into a primarily white environment. Rebecca felt that her mother's stance on the importance of belonging to a black community somewhat antiquated, yet she was beginning to understand her mother's position. "Now that I'm here in an environment where I actually am the minority, I can see why it's good to stick with your people but also branch out. I can see what she meant now."

LeNae also expresses some conflict in the desire to have and make black friends with being around non-black people. As discussed earlier, LeNae says she is not afraid to be around people who are not like her. However, when we talked about her involvement on campus and in student groups, she listed only groups that cater to black students. When I asked her why she chose these groups in particular to join, LeNae responded with the following:

> Just to make more friends. Of course, I make friends easier with African American people. Just to at least have somebody. If something racial does happen to me, I'll have somebody to run to that will agree or understand what I'm saying if I just need to talk. Just to have an extra support group, that I know for sure is going to understand me if I'm talking. What I'm saying is they'll understand and relate. Just to have somebody that'll actually relate to me.

Like LeNae, Brittany was pleased with herself for being willingness and ability to be around white people and those from a different class background, yet she also recognized the value in having black relationships. She said that being part of the black community was important because it allowed her a respite from the work of explaining the nuances of black culture to non-black people. When talking about being part of a black community on campus, Brittany said:

> It's important for me because you can get weary not having anyone to talk to about things like the music that you like or how you really, really, really want to go to the Probate or you want to be in one or how you want to have sweet potato pie, there's just some things that you know that they understand, they get and it's really cool.

These cases highlight several important themes within the ideology of this group of respondents. These students did not completely avoid black spaces. Rebecca, LeNae, Brittany and others did spend time in black spaces, be it church, school organizations, peer groups, etc. However they saw themselves positively for their willingness to be friends with anyone.

Overall, these respondents wanted friends who had shared interests and values, regardless of race. Anthony described his approach to friendship this way:

> I like people who are interesting, people who are not really like me. Well, people I can learn from, people who are different and have different experiences. That makes for an interesting conversation because we don't know everything about each other. If that makes itself someone who's black who's interesting, absolutely. But I don't give certain people a pass because they're black. "Oh, you can't be my friend just because you're not this." No. I think if you're interesting and are intelligent and I can have a conversation with you, we'll be friends. We'll be good.

Likewise, Lauren also did not see race as a prerequisite for friendship. In fact, based on her understanding of blackness, she in some ways saw it as less likely that she would be friends with they type of black people she was accustomed to encountering. However, Lauren went on to acknowledge value in being friends with black people, arguing that blackness provided a bond with others that goes beyond other similarities.

> I have never had too many black friends and I don't think it's necessary to know who you are, but I think it really helpful to just be with someone who has things really, truly in common with you. You can be with someone with like the same economic class or whatever as you, but being with a black person is nothing like that, like being around someone who's black, too.

I asked her to clarify her thoughts, as this response surprised me as it seemed to be a strict departure from some of her earlier statements. Lauren continued by saying:

> I think it's important to have black friends, because you can be around someone who has other things in common with you, like

> the type of money you're from, your economic situation, but it won't ever be the same as being around a black person….Being with someone who's black is always more, I don't know how to say, it's like, you can't compare being with someone that's black to being with someone that just has other things in common with you.

Lauren seemed to be unsure of her position on this issue and she seemed to be working through her thoughts out loud in the interview. She saw the value in black friends because of a shared kinship she saw as being deeper than other social categories, yet, in general she had an aversion to many of the traits she assigned to black people.

Taken together, the Ambassadors desired meaningful relationships with people within and across racial lines. Interracial relationships were seen as important for breaking down negative racial stereotypes and working towards better racial harmony. Intraracial friendships were seen as comfortable spaces to recharge from being in the racial minority. However the most defining characteristic of this group was their desire to seek interracial friendships and to feel that doing so was a more noble endeavor than to only seek friendships with those with whom they shared racial lineage. By not "giving a pass" to black people, these respondents placed individual characteristics over group ones. Whereas Commanders saw being around black people as preferable as it built collective bonds, Ambassador**s** found it easy to be in black spaces, but desirable to be in integrated social spaces as well. They were comfortable being around other black people, but were willing to stretch themselves and saw value in seeking non-white spaces. This value came not just from the actual quality of the relationships they had with non-black peers, but from the sense of self and satisfaction that came from being a person willing to seek those bonds.

"I Love the BSU!" – Relationship to the Campus Black Community

While the Ambassadors prided themselves on their willingness to make non-black friends, they were also excited to spend time in black campus spaces and student organizations. For these students, being involved in black student organizations was an important social outlet. In her Sophomore year, Dominique said:

> I love the BSU! I really needed the BSU last year because it was just like I didn't see any black people. I didn't really have anybody to talk to and connect with on that level. I talk to my roommates and my other friends, and it's fine, but it's like a different level of connection when you're talking to people of your race. Going to BSU, talking about our experiences, relating, once a week. Then you can build other relationships off of that.

Dominique spoke wistfully of her time at BSU meetings, which she described as "the core of our black community." Jasmine also enjoys going to black campus events, such as Black Homecoming, and black fraternity parties. "I like going to all that stuff when I can, because it's just nice to have us all in one place. It's nice to have something just for us." While Jasmine and other Ambassadors tout the importance of "branching out" and being willing to have interracial friendships, they also see the campus black community as an important home base.

Brittany also saw the black community and black campus events as a core part of her social life on campus. Earlier I described how Brittany described a good black person as one who was willing to reach across racial lines for friendship. At the same time, being part of the black community on campus was an important part of her experience. "Yeah, the black community is small, and close knit, but I love it. We have a lot of events and functions that unify us. We have fun at Black Homecoming, and the probate shows, and everything. We need it just to have time to be with each other and recharge." This idea of recharging encapsulates the Ambassadors worldview on the campus black community. Brittany enjoyed attending probates and other black

Greek organization events, but also saw it as her duty to tell white people about the events and explain black cultural traditions.

> I've had to tell white people about the traditions of black Greek life and I thought that if you were in a sorority, or if you're in a frat that you would know about these things. Not because you wanted to copy it or because you had to, but just to show respect to the black frats.

Brittany was not in a sorority, but was shocked at how little white sorority and fraternity members knew about black Greek letter organizations. She did not frame these instances as evidence of racism or discrimination, but rather as a learning opportunity. She told me about times when she has had to teach others about black Greek life.

> Apparently [a member of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Incorporated, a black fraternity on campus] had his cane and apparently somebody tried to grab it from him. Like this dude tried to take it out of the guy's hand and they don't understand that that's not ok, just because they don't know to respect something like that. So I teach my friends about it. I invite them to come with me, but I tell them, when they stroll you don't hop in, you don't giggle, you don't do that. There are things you just don't do, just not respectful and they don't know about things like that and I've had to explain to them. I thought that if you were in a frat that you would just know out of respect that they have, black Greeks have Probates and they don't know about that, so it was weird there.

Brittany was surprised that white students knew so little about black organizations, but took it upon herself to educate them. In this way, she was an actual Ambassador, helping people from another group learn about and appreciate her culture.

Ambassadors also took part in black professional organizations, for both social and career purposes. Aaron is involved in National Society of Black Engineers (NSBE) and likes it as it gives him support and a chance to socialize with his classmates. "I know there are a lot of black engineers but I feel like I never see anybody outside of NSBE meetings. So it's good to just go

and hang out and see people who are in the struggle with you." Likewise, Kiara is spending most of her out of class time doing work that supports her professional and academic interests. One of her favorite organizations is her major's research program for students of color. While this organization is not targeted at black students specifically, it is a place where she sees a lot of her black friends on campus. "I just really like it because I feel like I'm learning more about my major and getting to do research. And the people are fun too."

Like Aaron, Brittany is also involved in NSBE and sees it as an important part of both her social and professional life. "I like going to the conferences and to all the events and stuff. It is just fun to get to hang with everyone." Anthony also sees NSBE as a key part of his professional and personal development.

> I don't really get to see that many black students in my day to day, so going to the meetings is really fun. A lot of people think there aren't many black engineers. But then we get all in one room and you know you're not alone. There are others out there and we can learn from each other, get the help we need to succeed, and get access to opportunities. So it's probably the most important club I'm involved in.

Even for those Ambassadors who have not yet gotten fully integrated into the black campus community, they saw doing so as ideal. Evelyn is very involved in a campus religious organization and serves on its executive board. She has gone to a few meetings of the Black Student Union, but wants to become more active as she sees it as an important part of her college experience. She told me, " I like all the clubs I'm in now, but I know that I really want to be more active and join in Black Student Union and African Student Association. I know that I should and I don't want to leave here without being more a part of that stuff. Because I need black community too." Ambassadors saw black organizations as sites of socializing and professional development, and largely presented them as unproblematic. Whereas the

Commanders were especially attuned to the politics of these organizations, Ambassadors saw much less of a problem with them and were much less emotionally committed to the organizations when they did not meet all of their needs or expectations. The black campus community, with its social and cultural events as well as professional organizations served as an important home base for Ambassadors.

"We're Starting that Legacy" – Major Selection

For the Ambassadors, following their individual passions while being trailblazers for others were the most important stated factors in their career paths. The Ambassadors were much less interested in racialized careers, and did not express a desire to help black people through the work that they did. However, these students did position their race as a motivation for choosing a challenging career, as they felt they could make a difference by breaking a barrier or being a role model of a black person succeeding in a majority non-black career.

For example, Evelyn wanted to be a doctor, and had wanted to do so since she was eight. She decided to double major in Neuroscience and Music. Evelyn's desire to be a doctor was driven mostly by her intellectual curiosity, her assessment of her talents, and her goals, rather any explicit racial motivations. In her sophomore year, when I asked Evelyn her purpose for being in college, she said, "I feel like, just to empower other people. Other people see me as a role model and that is me getting my degree and going to medical school." Evelyn continued by describing how while most of her family had gone to college, few had gone to highly selective top institutions. "We're starting that legacy that one day my nephew or younger brother can partake in. I want to empower them that they can still do what they love, but something else they love as well. There aren't any limits to what they can be."

Ambassadors desire to break stereotypes also extended to the ways in which they made sense of their majors. These students were drawn to the challenge of a major, and wanted to succeed in areas in which they were not expected to do so. For example, Aaron was pursuing a degree in Computer Engineering in large part to prove other people wrong. He told me, "A lot of people say it's impossible to be a Computer Engineering major, so honestly that's the biggest reason I want to do it. Hearing people say, 'are you sure, you might want to think about doing something else' just makes me want to do it even more." When I asked Aaron in his sophomore year about his purpose for being in college, he said it was "to provide opportunities." He positioned his future career as a computer engineer as a way to let others from his neighborhood know that "there's a whole spectrum of stuff you can do with life. It doesn't have to be just whatever job is within a five mile radius of your house."

Meanwhile, Brittany was interested in aerospace engineering for similar reasons. It was her dream "to work for a big company in developing rocket propulsion systems." She also wanted to get her PhD in engineering and become a professor. Brittany's interest in her major was driven by her passion for learning and she wanted a major that would offer her a challenge. "I just love to learn. Even though sometimes it's difficult, I like the challenge. So I think that's why I decided on engineering." In her sophomore year interview, which came at the end of her fourth term in college, engineering was proving to deliver on the challenge she wanted, yet she still persisted. Brittany had failed Calculus II and another pre-requisite course, but was looking forward to junior year, now that she knew how to "play the game of the classes."

The desire to defy stereotypes, blaze new trails for black people in career paths, and set an example typifies the way in which Ambassadors make sense of their majors and occupations. Anthony wants to be a mechanical engineer because of his passion for engineering as well as his

desire to motivate and inspire. Anthony was inspired to attend this school because of the low number of black students enrolled in the school.

> I think for some people they see [the university] as a city on the hill. It is a great place to be, obviously, but it is not beyond anyone. So I wrote my college essays about wanting to go into the inner city schools here and tell people, 'listen, you have a great school in your backyard. You should go there. Do something, you can do it, look at me. That's kind of my driving force to be here and to be an engineer.

Overall, Ambassadors did not choose racialized careers, but did consider race in their motivation for pursuing majors. These respondents were seeking out careers that matched their interests and passions, would give them a challenge, and also give them the opportunity to inspire others. The Ambassadors' desire to defy stereotypes extended to their major selection as they discussed their careers in the context of being one of few black people and therefore setting a positive example and expanding people's vision of what is possible.

Discussion

The Ambassadors cultural schema shaped their actions in college in very important ways. These students thought well of themselves for their willingness to seek non-black friendships, and compared themselves to those who they thought were not willing to do so. This does not mean that these students necessarily had more non-black friends than any group, but what sets them apart is the meaning they ascribed to their efforts. In their worldview, being a good black person meant being willing to leave the comforts of other black people to engage with and educate white people. The Ambassadors saw these actions as their reasonable service, in which they would have difficult conversations with white people, and patiently explain to them the ways in which their actions were problematic. Whereas the Commanders took a more

confrontational approach, the Ambassadors drew distinctions against them for both their efforts and their diplomatic approach.

This is not to say that the Ambassadors had no use for the black community on campus. In fact, more than any other group, the Ambassadors spoke most positively of the black campus community. These students found the black community mostly unproblematic and a key part of their social and professional development. The black community was the Ambassadors home base on campus, that refueled them and gave them the strength to sustain their time out on their diplomatic missions.

The desire to be a role model extended to their choice of career. The Ambassadors sought out careers that were challenging and saw the low number of black people in their fields as an opportunity to break barriers. Consistent with other elements of their racial identity, these students saw their willingness to push themselves professionally as a testament to their virtue. I do not have the data to attest to their persistence in these majors, but even as freshman and sophomores they were framing the challenges of their careers as evidence of their commitment to building legacy within the black community.

Throughout their college experiences the Ambassadors remained committed to making change at the individual level. They felt that through their individual personalities they could break down negative stereotypes. Through their willingness to be friends with non-black people they could teach people how to be more tolerant. Through pursuing challenging career paths, they could make the path easier for the black youth who come behind them.

By focusing on their agency as individuals, they often disregarded structural barriers that black people may face. This worldview meant that they change was possible, they understood themselves as having the power to make things better. Yet, if change did not occur, they saw

individual black people as being to blame for not having "the right mindset." In this way, the Ambassadors pursued improvements in race relations as a diplomatic mission, and they were confident that their individual actions could help create a more equitable society.

CHAPTER VII.

Rejecting Race: Conscientious Objectors Cultural Schema

Jacqueline met me in my office for our interview. She was wearing fuzzy winter boots and a hat with a matching fuzzy tassel that bobbed as she spoke. Jacqueline is from Detroit and plans on majoring in Neuroscience with a goal of helping children with neurological disorders. She fidgeted a lot and spoke softly as we talked through most of the interview, but eventually settled in and became more engaged as we started talking about race. She sat to the edge of her seat and became increasingly animated as she vented her frustrations with what she deemed as society's obsession with race.

> I feel like the more they internalize their identity and be like, 'This is who I am!' the more they see everyone against them...the more you feel disconnected from other people because you're so focused on being that type of person that you're trying to label yourself to be. Don't think about it. I don't know, I just think the more you think about yourself as pro-black, the more you're prone to see everything as racist. A lot of black people shout that things are racist when they're really not. The more you try to characterize yourself, the more you're prone to making everything else worse.

Jacqueline's position that thinking and talking about race is what makes racism worse is indicative of that of the Conscientious Objectors.

Conscientious Objectors earned their name because of their rejection of racial categories and refusal to participate in what they see as an illogical racial landscape. These respondents are well aware of the battle going on around them, but have purposely chosen to remove themselves from the fray, or at least to not compete for the side they have been assigned by virtue of their

skin color. These respondents purport that their race is not important to them and is not worthy of much consideration as it should not be meaningful in the way they live their lives or in the way they are treated by others. Conscientious Objectors believe that American society is too concerned with race, and the way forward is to be more color-blind and race neutral. This worldview positions them on the sidelines of the battlefield, yet some might argue that by attempting to "sit out" they are in fact taking a stance in the war.

This group of 7 students is comprised of 3 men and 4 women. 3 of these respondents are black American, 3 are second generation African immigrants, and one's parents immigrated from the Caribbean. The social class distribution amongst this group is also more polarized than the other groups. Three of the Conscientious Objectors grew up in upper middle class suburban areas, in two parent homes, where parents had Bachelors' degrees or higher. The other four in this group were raised in urban, predominantly black environments with parents who did not complete college. These respondents did come from some of the most racially isolated environments in the study, with the low-income respondents being in almost entirely black schools and communities, and the upper middle class respondents in almost entirely white environments. The Conscientious Objectors were mostly concentrated in the STEM fields. Four students entered college pursuing pre-med majors, and two were engineers. Timothy was a Business major.

In what follows, I will detail Conscientious Objectors racial self-concept, the meaning, or lack thereof, they derive from their blackness, their racial ideology and belief in a color-blind society, and their thoughts about racism and discrimination. Finally, I will discuss how they think about other black people and their low racial regard.

I don't think about it - Self-Concept

Conscientious Objectors are characterized by their emphasis on the commonalities between all humans. While they are aware that society sees them as black, these respondents did not see blackness as an organizing principle in their lives or see their blackness as an important part of their self-concept. For some respondents, this refusal was an active choice, rejecting the status quo and acting against what was expected of them. For others, their understanding of what blackness is did not leave space for their personal characteristics, therefore they removed themselves from the category. Since they did not feel strongly connected to blackness, they saw it as not having much bearing on their everyday lives. With such weak ties to their racial identity, not considering their race served as an opportunity to distinguish themselves from others and focus on their individual characteristics. Jacqueline is a first generation college student who plans to become a doctor. When discussing what it means to her to be black, she said:

> I just try so hard every day to just not, I know it's really weird to say, to not feel myself in a physical body. I am more connected with my mental self than I am with my physical body. Probably a bad thing, but like I said, I don't get in front of everybody and be like, 'Wow, I am black,' or 'Wow, I am Christian.'

Jacqueline demonstrated her desire to not let her race or any social category define who she is, but she understood that this worldview is not in line with many who treat their social identities as points of pride. Jacqueline is well aware that others employ different cultural schemas, and think a lot about race. Yet she is making an active choice to reject these notions and focus on herself as an individual. The above quote represents her ideal version of herself, wherein she is not connected with her physical body. Throughout the interview, Jacqueline reveals that her race does in fact play a part in her life as she finds herself repeatedly expressing her frustration with the current racial organization of our society. However, she consistently expresses frustration at

those who let their race shape their interactions with others, even as she laments the times when she has done so herself. In professing to see oneself as an individual and not as a racialized being, the Conscientious Objectors can set themselves apart from those who they deem as too concerned with something as trivial as skin color.

Another key component of the Conscientious Objectors was that they had done less consideration of the role of race in their lives or of their own blackness. This expressed itself as a lack of interest in their race and a lack of exploration of their racial identity. These respondents were the least effusive in their responses and often responded with "I don't know" in my response to my questions about race. These respondents' silences, pauses, and visible discomfort in answering questions about being black provided valuable data (Young 2004). They had not rigorously considered what it is to be black and felt like talking about race was far outside of their comfort zone or knowledge sphere.

For example, Safiyah, a Muslim first-generation college student raised by a single mother, said the following when asked what it means to be black: "I would say I don't think about it. I don't know." When I asked her about how important her race was to her, especially in terms of her other identities, she said she saw her religion as being more important than her race. But when I asked if her race mattered at all for how she experienced her religion, she said no. Safiyah began to seem uncomfortable as we moved through the race portion of the interview. She shifted in her seat, and fidgeted with her hands as she spoke. She repeatedly said, "I haven't thought about this" and "You're asking me questions I don't know the answer to."

This was a strict departure from the confident, self-assured, thoughtful Safiyah from earlier in the interview. Earlier on, when talking about applying to colleges, selecting a major, and pursuing her hobby of horseback riding, Safiyah was energetic and quick to provide nuanced

well thought out responses. In fact, she professed that she always "does extensive research" about anything that she has questions about. The "extensive research" Safiyah did in regards to other aspects of her life differed greatly from the way Safiyah talked to me about race. It was clear that unlike most other topics in our interview, Safiyah had not felt it necessary to ever think about what it meant to be black. Her discomfort with the topic and answer of "I don't think about (being black). I don't know" reveals how relatively unimportant her racial identity was to how she understood herself, as compared to her academic identity, her hobbies, and other personal identities.

Malik also displayed a lack of interest in his racial identity. Malik is the son of a home health aide and a salesperson. He spoke to me with a quiet tone and radiated a nervous energy throughout our interview. When we discussed race, he seemed uncomfortable and struggled to articulate himself even more than he did at other points in the interview. When talking with Malik about the way race factors into how he sees himself, after several follow-up questions, he said the following:

> I guess I just try to be a decent person most of the time and I just kind of leave it there. I don't care too much about identifying myself as a type of person. Only because you are constantly changing how you see things and how you might interact with different people. I think that changes, you are constantly changing yourself as you go along, so I don't really ever try to identify myself as one thing or another.

Malik's reluctance to identify racially exemplifies the responses of those within this categorization. He, and other respondents, focused on their own positive attributes and personal identities rather than social identities.

Likewise, Emmanuel did not seem to consider race as having meaning on his life. Emmanuel is the son of Ethiopian immigrants and plans on majoring in Engineering. When

asked what it means to him to be black, Emmanuel responded by saying, “I don’t really think about it. I’m just me, I guess.” Later in the interview, Emmanuel went on to talk about his blackness saying, “it doesn’t really come to me day-to-day. I wouldn’t take time to think about it. If it comes to a point that I have to [think about being black], then yeah.” Emmanuel demonstrates a lack of racial centrality, wherein his race is not a key part of how he defines himself.

Melahni echoes this when she said, “It doesn't really affect me, it doesn't affect me, I don't really like looking at race as a barrier and people are just people to me.” Melahni positions considering race as a barrier to considering people as people. This is an important tenet of the Conscientious Objector worldview. For these respondents, thinking about race gets in the way of seeing others humanity. These quotes also demonstrate these respondents framing of race as something to think about only when it poses an issue. Blackness was not something worthy of celebration or exploration on its own, but rather only needed to be explained in relation to negative treatment or discrimination. Thinking about race was not important to these respondents either because they had not had the negative experiences with race that caused them to need to consider it, or they wanted to distinguish themselves from those who they thought were too focused on race.

Another factor in the Conscientious Objectors lack of racial centrality comes from their understanding of themselves as fundamentally different from other black people. While the Ambassadors said that they were different from the societal expectations of what a young black person is and sought to change those opinions through their individuality, the Conscientious Objectors have come to understand themselves as having irreparable differences with most black people, and therefore are seeking to opt out of the label. These respondents conjured up an image

of a young black person as being cool, tough, stylish, low-income, urban, and athletic. These respondents saw themselves as being outside of this description, and therefore found it easier to distance themselves from being black at all. Whereas the Commanders and Ambassadors problematized the widely held black stereotypes, the Conscientious Objectors embraced them, and saw their not fitting in as evidence that they being black is not for them.

Simone described feeling outside of the black community throughout most of her life.

> Even around other black people I feel like I'm invisible. Not just in college, but in high school too. In my school, you weren't black enough if you didn't act a certain way. I was considered "Oreo" because I acted white and then my skin color was black, which was stupid. I just had more white friends because I felt more comfortable with them. Then at the same time my white friends still I was the only black person. Not that they were racist or anything, but I felt that I was the only black person.

Simone's struggles with the term "Oreo," used colloquially by her peers to refer someone black on the outside and white on the inside, haunted her throughout her adolescence. She felt trapped by the weight of these expectations.

It is important to note however, that respondents from all three groups faced accusations of "not being black enough" whether that be from "talking white" or being called "Oreo" or a number of other insults. However, what differentiates these groups is their response to said insults. Ambassadors took them as a sign that they were challenging conceptions of blackness and hoped to broaden "what black looks like" to black and white people alike. Commanders took the insults and turned them on their head, often challenging people in the moment about why they thought so lowly of black people as to place them in such a rigid box of acceptable "black" behavior. Conscientious Objectors responded to these accusations by distancing themselves from a connection to a racial identity altogether.

The fact that their way of being was deemed as inappropriate for a black person served as evidence that conceptions of race were meaningless and arbitrary. Simone described it this way:

> Being called Oreo stopped making me feel any kind of way. At first it was before Oreo became the word for it, the definition bothered me. It was like, why does my skin color matter, first of all, second of all, why are you just assuming that I should have these characteristics when I'm this color, and accepting me or not accepting me because I don't have them. I didn't like that.

For Simone, being called an Oreo cemented that race as a concept should not be an organizing principle for her life. She felt trapped between white people who she felt were willing to be her friend because she "wasn't really black" and black people who expected her to be their friend because she was black, and therefore saw her as a traitor when she did not spend time with them. This back and forth between friend groups at school came to dominate her high school social experience. Her eventual conclusion was to stick to the people with whom she had the most in common, which was other white people and other "Oreos."

> I have never felt like I fit in with the black people. Not even because I'm Oreo or whatever, because they just have never welcomed me, I guess. At my school there were five Oreo's and we all just hung out together with our white friends because the black community never welcomed us because we weren't black enough or whatever.

Timothy came to a similar conclusion as Simone when faced with the accusation of being an Oreo. When I asked Timothy if there were any types of schools he knew he did not want to attend, he immediately responded "An HBCU. I knew for a fact that I wouldn't last in an HBCU." Timothy laughed heartily after this statement, as if it were the most obvious assertion ever. When I asked him what he meant, he said, "You know how they call people "Oreos" and stuff like that? That was basically what I was called….I don't really speak as if I'm what they say black, or like the Ebonics or is that what they call it? Whatever that is I don't speak it. I don't

even know what it is!" Timothy went on to describe how he once met some other black students at a college recruitment event who he said were "of that nature, like with the Ebonics and stuff" and he knew that he had nothing in common with them. These students he deemed as being more suited for HBCU's. "I just knew that I would never make it in an HBCU. Not that I don't like being around other black people, but kind of. I don't act like them. Everyone is different, but the stereotypical person that would go to an HBCU, that wasn't me."

Timothy's conclusion that he is not the right fit for an HBCU is representative of his larger feeling that he is not a fit among black people more generally. These Conscientious Objectors, embraced the term "Oreo" and saw themselves as being fundamentally different from other black people, and therefore blackness was not seen as important to themselves.
These differences between themselves and other black people can also have social class and ethnicity explanations. Timothy and Simone come from upper middle class immigrant homes. In this way some of their lack of connection to black Americans may be from their immigrant upbringing and social class standing. They understood the commonly held perceptions around black Americans to be that they were all from low-income, urban backgrounds. While in some ways this resonates with the findings of previous research (Smith and Moore 2000; Torres and Massey 2012), there were children of immigrants who grew up in upper middle class backgrounds who adhered to other schemas as well. Timothy and Simone's social distance from commonly held perceptions of what a black person is may have led to the Oreo label being applied to them, but it was their own adherence to this cultural schema that made that label stick and allowed them to embrace it.

“I don’t see how it makes a difference” - Meaning

Conscientious Objectors derived little meaning personally from being black, and did not see their blackness as shaping the way they lived their lives in any substantial ways. However, they were aware that since other people saw them as black, their lives could be affected. Rather than focusing on the potential negative effects of harmful stereotypes, or potential racism or discrimination they might face as a result of being black, these respondents mostly focused on the positive benefits they could receive from their blackness, either socially or materially. Blackness was something they could opt-in to when it would benefit them.

For example, Timothy is the son of Nigerian immigrants and was raised in an upper-middle class household. When asked what being black means to him, he said the following: “It’s just a skin color for me...it was never a thing. I always strive to be where people recognize and realize that I’m a cut above those people, whether that be with my grades, or recognition.” After my clarifying questions, he went on to say, “I’m pretty awesome, and I deserve, well not deserve recognition, but I’m better than most. I don’t know how I can say that.” I asked if he meant better than most black people or better than people in general, to which he responded, “Better than most people in general.” Although Timothy did not seem to think that being black was a meaningful category for him, he saw it as another opportunity to get the recognition he seeks. When describing his college application process, he mentioned applying for minority scholarships and being shocked not to receive them. He said: “I thought I was going to get it, all the white students thought I was going to get it. My parents thought I was going to get it. The students who won it thought I was going to get it, but I didn’t get it.” For Timothy, blackness served as a category he could draw upon to receive benefits, distinction, and rewards. It did not

organize the way in which he lived his everyday life, but it provided opportunities for scholarships, leadership positions, and internships.

Likewise, Malik saw being black as something that could help him in social situations. Being black was a way to seem cool, or to stand out amongst his mostly white friends. Malik said, "I guess some of the more positive stereotypes are kind of fun like people might think you're good at sports because you're black. That kind of thing. To me it's just kind of fun sometimes." Being able to be perceived positively socially because of his race was available to Malik in part because he is male. While Malik saw these positive benefits of being black, he felt that it did not mean anything to him personally or how he saw himself or approached situations. Malik described his father's attempts to instill within him a sense of racial pride by highlighting black achievements. Malik scoffed at his father's attempts to do so and called them pointless.

> I guess he was just trying to paint in my head that black people can achieve things or be smart or that kind of stuff. I guess that's what he was going for. To me, I don't really see it like that. If any one person can do it, I don't see why I couldn't. It's kind of a mindset I have. I think about it logically. I don't see how it makes a difference. I don't see how like, "Okay because I'm black I'm successful or because I'm black I'm not going to be successful." I don't think of it that way.

While Commanders relished in the idea of "black excellence" and attributed many of their successes to their blackness, Malik and other Conscientious Objectors prided themselves for "thinking about it logically." And in this estimation, race did not matter for how one's life turned out. It was not practical to assign such meaning to race, as an individual's own effort and outlook dictated what they achieve, and not one's skin color.

“We Should Be Color-Blind” - Ideology

Conscientious Objectors expressed a color-blind ideology, believing that the world should move beyond our rigid racial categories, and see people as individuals. Jacqueline expressed her frustration with our current racial categories and emphatically stated her belief that the world should be more color blind when she said the following:

> Like I said, I am a really science-oriented person, so I just think of everything analytically. I just find the whole race thing is stupid. It’s just a color. It’s just science. I just feel like we should be more color blind, because it’s not real, it’s a construct. You can’t help color…We start seeing people based on their exterior identity and not their inner identity. If you’re blind to that, then you can really only judge people on the things that matter…You have to just realize that there’s probably not going to be any time in our lifetime where race isn’t an issue, but the best you can do is just try to look beyond it.

Part of Jacqueline’s frustration was that the current categories of race presumed a connection to Africa as a sort of historical homeland that she did not feel.

> It's not that I don't like being called African American, because it's whatever, but I just feel like I am American, not African. I didn't come from Africa here. I don't know….I would like to just not to be seen as just a color. It's either you're white or you're black or you're Hispanic. It's like you don't have any ability to in between say what you are. Like I said, I grew up here. I don't know Africa. I'm not going to pretend like I do. I'm not going to pretend like I'm super for ... I don't know it. I know America, and that's who I am. But it's like, no.

In Jacqueline’s estimation, our current racial formation meant that there was not an option for her to identify as American or as an individual. She was forced by society to see herself as something to which she had little connection. Jacqueline was not the only respondent who felt frustrated with and limited by existing racial categories. Simone is the daughter of a Pharmacist and a nurse. She immigrated to the states from Nigeria with her parents as a toddler. When talking about if she preferred to be called Black, African-American, or something else, she said

“I think that race should just be gotten rid of, the word. I think it’s horrible. Why would you ever need to talk about that anyways?” Simone was frustrated by the reference to race and the role that race played in the lives of individuals and advocated for its removal from our collective lexicon. She argued that the introduction of racial categories was a tool for oppression.

> I don't think you should call people black anymore. We are talking about it in anthropology class and it's really cool about how races should just not be a thing. They shouldn't be based on color because races aren’t real. When you talk about animals it's easy to do race because it's the same breed of dogs or whatever, but for humans we're all so different that the only way we had to do it was color. It started with people like slave owners. They invented this race thing for humans so that they could have an excuse to marginalize them. Yeah, and to say, "Oh, it's okay to make them slaves because they're black." Then to keep marginalizing all these black people even if they're whatever percentage black. We should just get rid of race.

In her understanding of race as a social construction, she estimates that since race was made by people, it can also be unmade by people. Jacqueline suggests a similar idea, using a more biological understanding of race to justify her claims.

> I don't understand it. Just the whole concept of race is just so confusing for me. I hate talking to people about it, because I get really just angry, because it's like I feel like if you lose the melanin in your skin, you're just another person. It's just science. It's all science. You can't be mad because someone has a little bit more melanin than you do.

Framing race as the presence or absence of melanin places primacy on the biological component and ignores the social and historical meaning of those categories that were socially constructed. For the Conscientious Objectors, the logical solution to racial inequality was to stop thinking and talking about race.

Even though Simone and Jacqueline come from very different backgrounds, Jacqueline from a low-income, urban, predominantly black area, while Simone was raised in an affluent,

predominantly white suburban one, they came to very similar conclusions about how race is constructed. The language of the limited biological basis of race was publicly available and shared. These two students, and other Conscientious Objectors, were able to access this schema and use it to explain their distant connection to their racial identity. For Simone, this interpretation of race as meaningless was attractive because she saw herself as very similar to her white classmates. Jacqueline was drawn to this schema because she saw herself as being very different from her black peers and classmates in her neighborhood. In this way, we see how social class and pre-college experiences might matter for how individuals come to and use a certain schema, without completely dictating how an individual makes sense of their racial identity.

"They might not be as oppressed as they say" - Racism

Conscientious Objectors were aware that other black people felt that racism was still a major factor both as an abstract concept in the world, and as something that was part of their lived experience. However, for these respondents, claims of racism were largely overblown. They did acknowledge that racism and discrimination could exist, yet they were reluctant to label things as such. In their estimation, other black people were too concerned with race and too quick to see themselves as being marginalized or oppressed. For the Conscientious Objectors, the best solution to race relations was to not see things in terms of race, and therefore one would not feel marginalized. Feelings of marginalization were at the hands of other black people who isolated themselves and thought too much about race, not at the hands of the white majority. These respondents recognized that other black people did not share their beliefs, but once again were able to position themselves as being more rational and less emotional than those who framed themselves as victims of an unfair society.

Timothy talks about this as we discuss his experience of being black on campus. He acknowledged there were situations that some black people might see as being racial microaggressions, but he did not allow himself to see these situations as such.

> I'd say that I haven't been blatantly stereotyped or anything like that. Maybe there might be a thing where like I'm walking down the street, and a woman, say there's a girl in front of me walking away fast. I'm going to say, maybe I did look sketchy, I don't know. Would I do the same thing, if I saw someone following me? Probably would, so I don't blame them for anything like that.

Timothy once again relied on what he saw as the logical explanation rather than what he saw as the more emotional one. He went on to say, "I know a lot of people, they say they're just being stereotyped, they're being oppressed. It might not be oppressive. Isn't that like playing the race card? They might not be oppressed to what they say." Timothy invoked "the race card" as a negative tool that black people use to unfairly claim victimhood. He went on to discuss the Black Lives Matter movement and his hesitancy to protest in many of the recent killings of unarmed black men. Timothy said that some of the killings were justified, so he did not see the backlash as logical.

> A few of the "Black Lives Matter" should be "Black Lives Matter," but then there's ones where it's kind of, one of Trayvon Martin, that one was actually, that one was the one that was purely racist, because he was minding his own business. On the other side you have Mike Brown, where he, when you see the video...Did you see the video of him stealing? That one, you can see obviously where he's not, It's not like he's clean. It's not even like, "Oh, his background was clean." He did something illegal before he was shot, so even though he was shot like 6 times I think, in the back, so that shows that even that shouldn't be happening.

In Timothy's estimation, Michael Brown, who was shot and killed by a white police officer in Ferguson, Missouri was deserving of his fate. Timothy acknowledged that police shoot black

males at higher rates, and felt that the solution was for black men to adjust their behavior so they were not targeted.

> If you know that it's a high probability of that being to you, wouldn't you do everything in your power to at least try to influence it? If you know that most likely, I think the stats are like they shoot African-American males more, why would you steal and rob a store? You know if the police come or something, something is misinterpreted, that's bad….That's the way I see it. There's some events where it's rightfully so, and there's other events that were bad, I think.

This willingness to see both sides to issues like police brutality sets the Conscientious Objectors apart. The Commanders squarely placed the blame on police officers as individuals and the institution of the police. For them, the methods of protest were important given what they deemed as the dire stakes facing black bodies. The Ambassadors recognized police brutality as a problem and saw the Black Lives Matter movement as largely positive, as it was a way for black Americans to draw public support for their cause and change the minds of those who might see black people in a negative light. However, the Conscientious Objectors did not see the Black Lives Matter movement as a net positive, as they were unsure that the deaths at the center of many protests were racially motivated. They were also not convinced that the method of protest was helpful. Their color-blind racial ideology created a higher standard to consider something as racist or discriminatory than other respondents in this study.

In addition to police brutality, Conscientious Objectors were largely set apart from other respondents in terms of their explanations for low black attendance numbers in their college. Whereas Ambassadors and Commanders cited access to quality K-12 education, information gaps, and bemoaned the end of Affirmative Action policies, Conscientious Objectors thought that Affirmative Action claims were largely overblown. By considering race in admissions, these

respondents thought that black students might be receiving an unfair advantage. If black students were not prepared to enter an elite university, they should not be admitted, as they felt it might mean standards were being lowered to increase their numbers.

Jacqueline was the strongest proponent of these anti-Affirmative Action ideas. She recounted a story to me of a time early in her freshman year on campus. Jacqueline saw a table of students canvassing to defend affirmative action. Jacqueline went up to the table and asked the students to tell her about their cause. When the student told Jacqueline that they were trying to increase minority enrollment on campus, Jacqueline asked her why. Jacqueline smirked as she told me this story, clearly satisfied that she had shocked the person canvassing by not agreeing with her cause. According to Jacqueline the student at the table was stumped, and kept repeating that she wanted to increase diversity on campus. Jacqueline became increasingly more passionate as she told this story, leaning forward in her chair and raising her voice.

> I just hate it when people say they want to increase diversity. Do you want to let people in just because they're black? Then that's actually unfair, considering they're trying to say they are for racial equality or whatever. Why do you want to let black people in if they aren't going to be able to make it? If they haven't had good teachers, if they haven't done well in school, if they're just going to fail, why would you let them in? You can't force people to come here just for diversity. That's not equality.

Jacqueline and other Conscientious Objectors did not see any intrinsic value in diversity and were hesitant to label the lack of diversity as evidence of discrimination. The color-blind worldview of the Conscientious Objectors gave them a sense of optimism as they were able to explain away any potential racism, discrimination, or racial microaggressions. While they did acknowledge the existence of racism and discrimination, their overall position was that present

day racism was largely overstated. For these respondents, the cure to racism was to think less about race and to focus on the individual.

"They Just Sound So Stupid To Me" - Regard

The Conscientious Objectors attitude towards racism in some ways mirrors their attitude towards black people in America more generally. Conscientious Objectors presented more negative attitudes towards other black people than the other two groups of respondents. In their racial worldview, racism and racial discrimination were often overblown, and the culture and actions of black Americans explains and in some ways justifies their negative treatment. Ambassadors felt a close connection to other black people and saw themselves as close to this racial group, even while lamenting what they deemed as harmful components of black culture. However, Conscientious Objectors continually distanced themselves from black people, especially when describing behaviors they did not like. These respondents often referred to black people as "they" whereas the other two groups often used "we" to describe the actions of black people, even those to whom they were not related or did not know. Conscientious Objectors distanced themselves from blackness both in their appraisal of our current racial structure when they advocated for a more color-blind society, and also in their language when they described black people using othering language such as they. This demonstrates their negative private regard for black people.

The language used by other black people was off-putting for the Conscientious Objectors. When asked about his least favorite thing about being black, Malik told me, "Some of the words they used. Some of the ghetto language terms people come up with. Most of the time they just sound stupid to me. The 'n-word' just sounds stupid to me." Simone echoed this when she lamented the use of the word nigga.

> Then people use the word nigga and I honestly hate that word. They would use it so freely and it was like a black people only thing. I am like, "No, that should be a no one should use that word." Even though it doesn't have the same negative connotation it just makes me feel uncomfortable when people say it.

While some argue that black people using the word is repurposing something that was meant to harm and giving it new power, the Conscientious Objectors did not see it as such. To these respondents, the use of this word, along with other slang, was evidence of the negative aspects of black culture. The argument that some could use the "n-word" and others could not was nonsensical to these respondents. In their worldview, which sought to minimize racial lines, to use race as a determining factor for who had access to language was unacceptable. These respondents felt that if black people did not like when the word was used against them, they should not use it themselves.

In addition to language, Conscientious Objectors had negative feelings about many aspects of what they deemed as black value systems. These respondents felt that black families did not place enough emphasis on education and instead were focused on material gain through illicit pursuits. These respondents believed that black students were likely to negatively perceive those they deemed as "acting white." They felt that other black students coded academic achievement as white behavior. Malik described this phenomenon when he said, "I guess the culture of black people isn't that smart, at least from my experiences, if you're smart it isn't cool." Jacqueline also felt that black culture was not encouraging of intellectual pursuits.

> It's just the black community is just extremely materialistic and just is really bent on impressing people and things like that. For instance, let's see ... For instance, I don't understand the black community obsession with special shoes and money. I just don't understand. You can't afford to pay your housing payment, but you have to have these $200 shoes….For instance one of my friends, she was complaining about how she doesn't know how she's going

> to pay for college, and yet she has all of these super brand name items and just pays so much and pay almost $2,000 on her prom dress. I'm like, "You're being ridiculous. You're doing this to impress people, and people can never internalize why they're doing it. That's just the thing in general. They don't ... I don't know. They're more concerned about material things than, like I said, for example, education. Things like that just really bother me.

Jacqueline positioned caring more about material possessions than saving for college as a part of black culture and a uniquely black phenomenon. I asked her a follow-up question about this, as I wanted to know if she thought that other racial groups behaved similarly, or if materialism was mostly a black problem. Jacqueline responded by saying, “It’s definitely just a black thing, but I guess I really only know my community.” In this moment, Jacqueline admitted that she had only been exposed to black people and had far less intimate knowledge of other racial groups. Jacqueline then continued on, “People will kill each other over a Louis Vuitton belt or a Gucci dress. It's really ridiculous, and I don't understand. It's really sad, because they say we're at a much greater battle with the world, and it's like we're having this battle with each other. It's just really stupid.” Jacqueline’s frustration at the black people that she grew up around, mostly low-income black Detroiters, informed her entire racial worldview. She knew that there were black people who were upset about discrimination and racism, yet those closest to her were engaged in behavior that she deemed as unhelpful to their precarious economic position. For Jacqueline, the issues “within the community” were much more pressing than any threats faced from outside. Jacqueline articulated this position when she told me this:

> We are doing what we can, but you're not attacking the problem where it matters most. That's within the community. Instead of just trying to fight back all the time, maybe we should start with improving in our own communities, and then start from there, because you can't just continuously keep fighting a battle with soldiers who have no way of winning. Yeah.

Therefore in her mind, the enemy was not individual white people (as the Ambassadors might think) nor systemic racism (as the Commanders would blame), but rather black cultural values. This is a key difference in the racial worldviews of these three groups of respondents.

While these respondents protest not to care about race, not to think about race, and not to be defined by race, they do see things in a racialized way, often coding that which they deem as black as negative. As these respondents do not feel closely connected to what they think of as black, they find themselves rejecting racial categories all together. All respondents in my study are aware of the commonly held racial understandings, but what separates the groups is their responses to them. Ambassadors are aware of negative black racial stereotypes and try to change the stereotypes through their positive behavior, Commanders try to dismantle the system that produced the stereotypes, and Conscientious Objectors try and distance themselves from being black.

Discussion

As presented here, the Conscientious Objectors racial worldview is complex and nuanced. These respondents are aware of the rules of engagement, yet choose to avoid the battle and upend the rules wherever possible. They understand that race is part of the larger society and dictates how others organize their lives, however, they try to not let it govern themselves. These students are well aware of the negative stereotypes and stigma facing black bodies, in fact they believe many of these stereotypes to be true, and the negative treatment of black people to often be deserved. These students have decided the appropriate way forward is to distance themselves from the label of black. These students do not see their blackness as an important part of who they are, and think the world would be better off if everyone thought less about

race. Conscientious Objectors proudly espouse color-blind ideology and profess a humanist perspective.

However, this profession is not without its contradictions. Conscientious Objectors are aware that being black can benefit them at times, namely through positive stereotypes and social benefits that are available to black men. Being black is something they say they do not think about, or would only think about if it presents itself as a problem, yet they have well defined ideas about negative cultural traits of black people.

Conscientious Objectors come from some of the highest social class backgrounds of those in the study, as well as the lowest social class backgrounds. Yet, they still found themselves adopting the same cultural schema. Students like Jacqueline, Malik, and Melahni were from low-income predominantly black American urban environments and saw themselves as being distinct from those around them. The Conscientious Objector worldview helped them explain how race operates in their lives. These students interpreted their differences from those around them as evidence that the concept of race itself was flawed. Likewise, those from wealthier backgrounds and immigrant backgrounds (Simone, Timothy, Emmanuel, and Safiyah) are able to distance themselves from what they see as mainstream black culture, which they characterize as being mostly low-income, urban, and American. As they do not fit in these markers, they can come to a similar conclusion that race is not an important way of defining themselves. In this way, we see social class, ethnicity, and place mattering in how individuals came to their schema of choice, and not necessarily dictating which schema they chose.

Of the three groups, Conscientious Objectors contains the largest proportion of immigrant respondents. As first- and second-generation immigrants, it may be the case that these respondents have another salient identity to invest in aside from their race. This might

give them the ability to easily distance themselves from their race and see themselves set apart from their blackness. However, it is not the case that all immigrants in the sample make sense of their race in this way. There are students from immigrant families in upper middle-class households in each of the three groups. It is not the case that their immigrant status has determined that they will take on the Conscientious Objectors schema, rather that while all options are open to them, their ethnic background might clear the path for them to choose the Conscientious Objectors route.

The Conscientious Objectors stance on race means that they are not living life confined by pressure to overcome negative stereotypes or to be a positive example to members of their race. Whereas the Ambassadors felt high pressure to change stereotypes through their positive behavior, the Conscientious Objectors did not report this feeling. They were aware that negative stereotypes about black people existed, but did not feel burdened or constrained by them, as they already felt like they were outside of black culture. As I will discuss in the next chapter, this freed the students up to live a life unencumbered by considerations of who to hang out with, what clubs to join, what to major in, or what career path to follow, as they felt like they could make the most logical choice, not one dictated by a sense of obligation or duty to their race.

Their understanding of race relations let them enter every encounter expecting a positive outcome, or gave them away to reframe something that could be considered a racial slight, to something more individual or personal. As Timothy said, maybe the white student started walking faster when he approached because he was acting sketchy, not because he is black. By being able to reframe these instances as being about something other than race, these respondents were able to feel more in control. For Conscientious Objectors, believing the best in others allowed them to remain positive and see themselves as in control of their own destiny. In

their worldview, if one gives too much power to race, then they are relinquishing some of their personal power. The Commanders, who approached every interracial encounter with an air of suspicion, were not convinced that white people had their best interests at heart. In fact, they were mostly convinced that their white students were at best ignorant participants in a system of white supremacy, and perhaps more likely active proponents of the system. By having an optimistic approach, the Conscientious Objectors were able to not have to deal with "racial battle fatigue". They have chosen to sit out the battle, and in their minds, this will protect them from the scars of war.

However, being attuned to racism and discrimination where it is present also has its benefits. Conscientious Objectors positive attitudes and optimistic feelings about race relations leaves them uninoculated to the stings of discrimination. They believed that everything was a matter of hard work, perseverance, and having the correct cultural values. This meant that the students did not have the tools to cope with the effects of racism or discrimination and instead placed the blame on themselves and others.

These students pride themselves on having a logical and rational approach to race relations. They believe that race truly is only skin deep, and to attribute meaning to skin color or hair texture is not rational. This rationality is a point of pride for these students who are able to position themselves as morally superior to those who organize their lives based off of how much melanin a person has. Another point of pride for these students is their independence and free thinking. These students draw a distinction between themselves and those who get bogged down by considerations of race. By consistently invoking "the science" of race or what they learned in their classes about the origins of race, they are able to position their stance as the more educated and high-minded interpretation, rather than one that is based in feelings and

emotion. This characterization of themselves as freethinking, logical, and more evolved is important to these respondents and the way in which they see themselves.

CHAPTER VIII.
"It Doesn't Make Sense to Base Everything on Race": Conscientious Objectors on Campus

In the previous chapter, I presented how the Conscientious Objectors make sense of what it means to be black. In this chapter, I focus on how this schema plays out on the college campus and matters for their college experience. Specifically, I look at how these students navigate the social and academic aspect of college, including how they make friends on campus, how they interact with the campus black community, their extra-curricular involvement, as well as their major selection and intended career paths. In each of these arenas, the Conscientious Objectors use their racial schema to interpret the structural conditions and conceive of possible actions.

While these students are aware that others are concerned with race and make decisions based on their racial background, these students conclude that the best way forward is to make decisions based on their personal interests, not a larger commitment to a racial group. These students also see themselves as being extremely logical, and see themselves positively for their ability to see things in a rational way, not caught up in an emotional attachment to race. In what follows, I will demonstrate that adhering to this schema in college opens these students up to pursue their passions and interests, yet blocks them from meaningful relationships with other black students.

"You Should Be Mixing With Other People" - Friendships

The Conscientious Objectors understanding of their race shaped their approach to making friends on campus. When Jacqueline told me about her strategy to make friends in college, she

repeated a common refrain that she came back to throughout her interview saying, “people are people regardless of their skin tone. I choose not to see color. When I make friends, it's not like ‘my white friend’ or ‘my Asian friend’, it's ‘my friend’. If I'm not around a certain number of black people, that's fine.”

This approach to friendships was characteristic of the Conscientious Objectors. This desire to be mixed in with other people extends to these respondents’ assessment of the black community on campus. For some of the Conscientious Objectors, the black community was self-segregating and too isolationist. For others, they were not sure that it existed. In some ways, these two attitudes towards the black community differ, but they are united in their thinking that black students on campus are too concerned with spending time with other black people, and should base their friendships and extra-curricular involvement on similar tastes and interests, rather than race.

Simone is one of the Conscientious Objectors frustrated by the lack of integration at the school. She felt that this was because of a self-segregation wherein affinity groups focused too much on race and were not inclusive of others.

> I have felt like sometimes our school can be pretty segregated. It is like self-segregation. It is like there are a whole bunch of multi-cultural groups, but usually the multi-cultural groups are just either a whole bunch of different white people or they're a whole bunch of minorities, but not black people. Then they have the black orgs that say that white people are welcome, but you always end up having two white people in these black orgs. It is like a self-segregation to feel more I guess welcome and belonging in your smaller community.

Simone felt that being in campus organizations based on race excluded others. While she recognized that some students needed to feel more “welcome and belonging” in a smaller community on a large campus, she lamented the lack of integration among students. Similarly, for

Melahni, making friends of different ethnic backgrounds was a highlight of college. She was frustrated that other black students were not taking advantage of that opportunity.

> All the different cultures you can learn so much from different people and I definitely have. I have a Malaysian friend I just met. He is so cool and you talk about the different cultures, what kind of food they eat, you learn so much so just excluding people is just, ugh. [Other black students] do talk to some other people but they just feel like they need that community. But you should be mixing with other people!

Melahni was very emphatic about black students needing to branch out. Her level of enthusiasm on this point was matched by the Commanders who spoke about how black students who did not hang out with other black people were not "really black." These oppositional understandings of the appropriate way to be black highlight the differences in these racial ideologies. For the Commanders, being "really black" is to spend time with other black people, and to always acknowledge another black person when you see them. For the Conscientious Objectors, to be a real college student is to be in integrated spaces and build relationships with people you can learn from and enjoy spending time with.

Another aspect of the Conscientious Objectors was their framing themselves as logical for not worrying about race when choosing how and with whom to spend their time. When I asked Emmanuel if there was a black community on campus, we had the following exchange:

> Emmanuel: I don't know if there is a black community. I haven't looked for one, but I don't know if there is one.
> Me: Is that something that you have any interest in trying to know more about?
> Emmanuel: I guess maybe if I had time, but I don't really have a lot of time. There's a lot of other things to do. It doesn't make sense to base everything on race.

Similarly, Malik felt like finding a black community on campus was not a priority for him.

> Malik: I think there is [a black community]. I don't know if there is. I'm pretty sure there might be.
> Me: Would you consider yourself part of that community?
> Malik: Probably not.
> Me: Is that something that's important to you?
> Malik: Not really. I don't really care about fitting in with groups of people or anything like that. Not like, just because I'm black I'm not going to force myself to hang out with other black people, that kind of thing.

The idea that one would have to force oneself to hang out with people based on race was pervasive amongst Conscientious Objectors. Whereas other groups felt that it was natural to hang out with other black people as they assumed that they inherently had things in common with other black people. However, for the Conscientious Objectors, there was no assumed shared kinship, as they only saw themselves linked by a skin color. These respondents felt that the only logical and rational thing to do then was to spend time with whomever you had the most in common with, and whoever was around, not to spend time in search of a minority community with whom you do not necessarily share common interests.

When I asked Timothy about a black community on campus, he racked his brain for evidence of one. He thought about it, leaning back in his chair and looking to the ceiling for answers, then listed a few organizations of black students that he knew about, and a few group chats he had been added to on social media. He suddenly sat forward in his chair after thinking of another piece of evidence that a black community exists on campus. "Oh! There's a fraternity that has parties and stuff like that!" However, he quickly told me that he had no desire to attend any more of their functions after going to one party.

> It was a little, not sketchy, but it was like smoking inside the house, doing other stuff that I wouldn't do. That's why I kind of like, I don't go to that, because I don't do the stuff they do, so I just don't go, usually. Any rational person, if you don't like

> smoking, and one club there's smoking, then you probably wouldn't go to the club. That's how I see it.

By framing his decision to not attend black parties as a rational one, Timothy positions his color-blindness as logical, and considering race when making choices for friendships as illogical. The sheer fact of the low numbers of black students on campus (their freshman class was 4% black) made seeking black people not a worthwhile endeavor. Jacqueline put it succinctly when she described an exchange she had with one of the few black friends she had made thus far. Jacqueline said, "because one of my friends, she just gets really upset with me because it's like, 'You never hang out with black people.' I'm like, 'Well, I'm sorry that there's not many on campus. For the ones that are on campus, I really don't connect with.' It's really whatever."

For Conscientious Objectors, black friends were not a priority and were only necessary when and if they aligned with their interests and values. The idea of making friends based on race when black people were in the racial minority seemed irrational. The worldview of the Conscientious Objectors dictated that they spend time with people of all races and find traits besides race on which to base their decision making.

"I Knew it Would Look Good" – Campus Involvement

The Conscientious Objectors logical orientation to race relations extends to the way in which they organized their campus involvement. These respondents saw black professional organizations as potential resume boosters, but did not see much need for black social organizations. For these students, black organizations were useful in terms of the connections they might provide, but were not prioritized over other types of organizations. Malik spent most of his out of class time playing video games with his friends and working on robotics projects. When I asked him if there were any other campus organizations or activities he wanted to get

involved with before he graduated, he told me the following, “I’ve recently though about this one thing. I think it’s a Black Engineering Society, which I might check out.” Malik struggled to recall the name of the National Society of Black Engineers, but halfway through his sophomore year was interested in attending his first meeting. When I asked him why he wanted to get involved with NSBE, he said “I heard it’s a good network, and you can go to conferences and get internships and stuff. So I guess I’ll go see.” Malik was not interested in the social aspects of NSBE or in using it as a way to feel connected to a larger black community, instead, he saw it as a potential benefit to him professionally.

Similarly, Timothy prioritized all his campus involvement based on how it would look to potential jobs. He was applying to get into several consulting clubs, and was considering joining the Finance club if he chose to specialize in finance. He played soccer on a club team as a physical outlet, but only attended games if he had time and saw it as much less important than the resume builders he was a part of. Timothy was a member of the Black Business Association as another resume builder. He saw being a part of the organization as almost a guaranteed leadership position that would make him competitive to recruiters who came to campus looking specifically to fill spots for diversity internships. Timothy said, “I joined BBA because I knew it would look good. I tried to get on the Executive Board this year but I didn’t even get an interview which was, in my eyes, I’m not going to throw a fuss over it, but seeing the people who are on the E board, I should have gotten it.” He then went on to list out his GPA and the highlights of his resume that he felt made him a shoo-in for this position.

> Unless they are looking for people who don’t have much on their resumes to give them experience, it should have been me. They are pretty unorganized and everything anyway, but I know it looks good when diversity recruiters or whatever visit if you’re in that org. So that’s why I wanted to do it. I’m just saying, what’s going

> on? I don't know, I'm not angry, I'm just shocked. That's a better word, I'm just shocked at what's going on.

Timothy's anger was that he was excluded from a black organization that he thought he was qualified for. In many ways this exchange in his sophomore year interview mirrors a conversation we had in his freshman year about a black scholarship he applied for before entering college. Timothy saw his blackness as an asset that could make him eligible for benefits or membership into clubs. His frustration came from a sense of entitlement to the material gain he thought should receive as from being a part of the club. In some ways, Timothy's passionate frustration at the way in which black campus organizations are run sounds like some of the frustrations of the Commanders. However, Timothy's frustration is not rooted in the content of the group's work, its approach to black liberation, or its inclusion of black people across gender, sexuality, or class lines. Timothy, like the Conscientious Objectors and Ambassadors more generally, does not have an emotional or substantive connection to the black campus organizations, but sees them as an additional opportunity to build his resume.

Cultural schemas mattered for how respondents made sense of this involvement, and how they prioritize which activities should be getting most of their time and effort. While previous research has focused on social class, ethnicity, and racial background as indicators for who feels close to the black community on campus, this evidence complicates those findings. For my respondents, it was not the case that black students of a particular social class background, ethnicity, or racial background felt closer to the black community on campus or the black affinity groups. Rather, students' understanding of their racial identity mattered more than demographic factors for how they understood the role of the black organizations and the closeness they felt to them. The Commanders were frustrated by the politics of black campus organizations, while also

feeling marginalized in other organizations. The Ambassadors saw the black organizations as an important part of their social lives, while the Conscientious Objectors saw them as a way to access professional benefits.

"I Want to Do Something That Will Stand Out" - Choosing a Major

The Conscientious Objectors motivation for their majors was largely based on their own personal interests with little consideration for the racial implications of the work itself, nor the racial demographics of major or career field. Conscientious Objectors espoused race neutral explanations for their selected majors and intended careers. These students were interested in the money, occupational prestige, as well as their own interests and skills. None of these respondents mentioned race at all in their discussions of their purpose for being in college. The Conscientious Objectors career plans were centered around the life they wanted to live as adults, and not necessarily the impact they could have. While respondents in other groups framed their interests in healthcare as a way to fight health disparities or be an example to other black people, the Conscientious Objectors wanted to be doctors because it was a career that made money or would help them realize a childhood dream.

Simone's career path has been established since childhood. She says that she wants to be a doctor "for typical overachiever reasons." Her pharmacist father has had a large impact on the major she selects on her way to medical school. After taking an anthropology class in her first semester, she was very interested in majoring in medical anthropology, but her parents were not supportive as they had not heard of the field. "I tried to tell my parents that I could major in art history and still be a doctor, but they had never heard of anthro, so that just wasn't going to happen." As her parents were paying for her college education, Simone granted them final decision making power on her major selection. She and her parents felt that a Biopsychology,

Cognition, and Neuroscience major and a Medical Anthropology minor would be a fair compromise.

Emmanuel is also pre-med, but is undecided on his major. “I just want to do something that will stand out and help me get into medical schools. I feel like everybody majors in Biology so I don’t want that. I want the schools to know I tried hard and pushed myself and didn’t take the easy way out.” Malik wants to be a computer engineer as he is an avid gamer. Malik’s interest in engineering stemmed from childhood and has not wavered through his first two years in college. “I just found the things that make computer go from one part to another, and how you make the video character move so interesting. So, I’m pretty much set on doing this.”

The Conscientious Objectors focus on the lifestyle they wanted to live freed them up from any expectations or pressures based on race. But it also meant that it was not clear that they were driven by deep passions that would sustain them once the major became difficult. Melahni was interested in being a doctor at first, but then realized that being a surgeon would mean being on call and long hours that would keep her away from her future family. When she found out about being a nurse or a nurse practitioner, she decided to apply to the School of Nursing. “Being a nurse just fits better. I’ll still get to help people and I think it’s the same as being a doctor, I just get to come home at night.”

Similarly, Timothy was less committed to the major than the lifestyle it would earn him. “I just care about what is going to make me the most money and be like the most respected. I thought about engineering, and a doctor, and a lawyer and all those but it seemed boring or just not me. So business is the only one left that makes a lot of money and people will see as like, a real major.” Timothy’s construction of a “real major” was based around pre-professional majors that led to occupational prestige. He was not particularly passionate about business, but was

passionate about its social standing on campus and the future earning potential. “People are always impressed when I say I’m in the business school. Not a lot of people get in as freshmen. So that’s one of the best parts.” Timothy, and other Conscientious Objectors understanding of their racial identity meant that they did not need to consider the ways in which their race would matter for their jobs. This differed greatly from the other two groups, for whom race mattered both in the work that they did and the example they set.

Discussion

For the Conscientious Objectors, being in the minority on campus is mostly a sheer numerical fact, devoid of other meaning for how they should experience college. These students do not report being bothered by being one of few black students in their classes, and feel comfortable being in majority white spaces. For these students it is logical to be friends with who is nearby and who has shared interests, not to make friends based on race. It is logical to join organizations that align with your passions and will help you professionally, not to join things based on race. It is logical to major in a field that will position you well for your career and the lifestyle you want to live, not to choose a major based on race. Throughout their college experience, these students commitment to this cultural schema helped them to see themselves as rational, logical beings, separate and apart from those who consumed themselves with issues of identity.

In making this choice to abstain from the conversations about race happening around them, these students made a choice. The Conscientious Objectors were the students who the Commanders felt were not “really black” as they spent their time with non-black friends and did not feel it was important to speak to other black people when they saw them or to support black events. Using the Conscientious Objectors schema, this choice, was logical, rational, self-

evident, and moral. For the Commanders, this choice of where to spend your time and relationship to the black community was inconceivable. In this way, how these students made sense of their race shaped what actions they thought of as possible, and what they saw as desirable and valuable in other people.

For the Conscientious Objectors, distancing themselves from their racial identity appears to come with a sense of freedom. These students are not tied to expectations around their race and are free to pursue passions and interests based on their skills and talents, not out of a commitment to a larger social group. However, this means that these students do not have access to the social support provided from having strong networks of black friends. As scholars have demonstrated (Cohen and Willis 1985, Clark 2006), social support can serve as a protective factor for the negative effects of discrimination. It may be the case that the Conscientious Objectors already have social support from these other peer networks they are establishing outside of the black campus community. It also may be the case that by not perceiving instances as being microaggressions or discrimination, and rather attributing them to individual personality differences, they are not subject to negative health effects. As Sellers and Shelton (2003) demonstrated, racial centrality is positively associated with perceived racial discrimination. Therefore, as these students do not see their race as being central to who they are, they also do not perceive many instances of discrimination. This study design does not allow me to evaluate these hypotheses, but they are worthy of consideration in future research.

Taken together, the Conscientious Objectors sit on the sidelines and watch their fellow black students engage in a battle for their humanity on campus. Being on the sidelines helps the Conscientious Objectors dodge most of the arrows of the battle, but when they get hit, who is there to help them mend their wounds?

CHAPTER IX.
Conclusion

In this dissertation, I presented three cultural schemas of racial identity that help students interpret what it means to be black and guide their actions as they navigate the university. In doing so, I have demonstrated the variation that exists in racial sensemaking, and highlighted how that variation matters for student experience. Through this case study of one particular university, I am contributing to a larger story of black people navigating mobility enhancing institutions. In what follows, I will summarize the key findings, and speak to their implications for a variety of stakeholders, namely sociologists studying racial identity, scholars of higher education and those interested in supporting university students, those interested in race relations in the United States, and perhaps most importantly, black college students themselves.

In many ways, this study is not a perfect one. With a small sample size at one university, there is limited generalizability. I would like to have re-interviewed each respondent and tracked them over a longer period to better understand their trajectories. It may have been helpful to interview more black men for this study, as well as non-cisgender, non-heterosexual black students. Racial identity is only one of many factors that shape how students' approach and make sense of the university. This study pays minimal attention to the myriad of other social identities, or differences in material resources that matter for how students experience college. However, despite these imperfections, this study contributes to our understanding of the black experience,

by helping us see how students make sense of being black at one of the key times of their lives, the start of their university careers.

This study has several key findings. I will begin by revisiting my guiding research questions: How do black college students conceptualize their racial identity and make sense of the racial landscape of their university? How does the use of a particular schema matter for the college experience of these students? I found that the students in this study used three distinct cultural schemas to make sense of being black and interpret the university setting. These schemas carried strong moral and emotional commitments, and mattered for the way in which students drew intra and interracial boundaries. Adherence to a particular schema closed off potential pathways for engagement on the college campus, and may have implications for life after college.

I documented three cultural schemas of racial identity. These publicly available, shared understandings of racial identity were available to respondents no matter their class background, pre-college experiences, and ethnicity. However, these factors did set the conditions under which individuals adopted a schema. By looking at multiple dimensions of racial identity, including self-concept, meaning, ideology, regard, moral boundaries, and their thoughts on race relations and racism, helps us understand variation in racial identity in a more powerful way than looking at these concepts in isolation. This project helps us move beyond simply saying that there are multiple ways to be black or mapping all variation in racial ideology onto other demographic factors. This approach allows us to consider the cultural material of racial identity, and respond to the socio-historical moment. These students choose a schema based on the cultural material available to them in their schools, their homes, their peer groups, but also on the internet, in their politics, and on their screens. In this way, I am providing some insight onto why people operate

in the world the way they do, as a result of the schema they use to filter and make sense of their reality.

Friendships, campus involvement, and major selection were all interpreted through the lens of these cultural schemas. While on the surface, these students may appear to have similar outcomes, in that they associate with black and white friend groups, they belong to some of the same campus organizations, and they share similar majors, they conceptualize these actions differently. The Commanders prioritize black solidarity, and thus see making black friendships as most important. The Ambassadors value their black friendships, but prioritize their willingness to branch out and seek interracial friendships. The Conscientious Objectors prioritize making friends with people with whom they share common interests, regardless of race. In each case, these students are interpreting the structural conditions of being the racial minority on campus, and finding ways to best navigate this experience. Their choices appear to the students as self-evident and the natural course of things, which speaks to the power of and their commitment to these schemas.

I also demonstrated the variation in how each group makes sense of black affinity groups on campus. Commanders seek black organizations as spaces to do the work they do in their everyday lives, to organize, support one another, and to combat the systems of oppression they see on campus and beyond. They become frustrated with these spaces who they do not deem as progressive enough, or inclusive enough to do the work they feel needs to be done. Ambassadors see these spaces as largely unproblematic spaces of social support. They enjoy the time they spend in the black clubs and organizations and see them as an important part of their college experience. The Conscientious Objectors are aware of the black organizations as sites for more professional advancement, but are not invested in them as vital parts of their social lives. This

variation emphasizes the importance of looking at more than pre-college experiences to explain closeness to the black community.

This finding adds to the race and higher education literature, by helping us to understand another reason why black students may not feel closely connected to the campus black community. While previous research has demonstrated the importance of social class, pre-college experiences, and ethnicity, this research adds the dimension of conceptions of racial identity. Some might expect that the Commanders feel closest to campus black organizations, as they have what some might consider the strongest attachment to their racial identity. However, these students were the most dissatisfied with the campus black community, as they felt overall, the student organizations were not progressive or inclusive enough. The Commanders craved a black community that was committed to supporting all black students, and was equitable in its leadership.

In terms of major selection, the Commanders were most drawn to racialized careers, and used racialized explanations for the careers they chose. The Ambassadors were drawn to careers in which they could break barriers and defy stereotypes, while the Conscientious Objectors were drawn to jobs that match their interests and lifestyles. This helps extend and clarify the findings from Beasley (2011) by being clear on how elements of racial identity matter for career interests.

Taken together, this study highlighted the variation in racial sensemaking among black college students and demonstrates how this variation shapes student experience. In what follows, I will highlight some key takeaways for this study and areas for future research.

Implications for Our Understanding of Racial Identity

In this work, I made the case for cultural schemas as a way to conceptualize black racial identity. Looking closely at typologies advances our conception of racial identity by crystallizing

these multiple dimensions of how one makes sense of being black into patterned groups. In doing so, we can unpack identity, a term which carries with it loads of analytical baggage. In this work, I argue that racial identity is about more than racial identification. That is, all those in the study "identify" as black. Each of these students would (and did) check the box next to Black/African-American when applying to school, see themselves that way in their daily lives, and know they are perceived by others to be black. These schemas move beyond racial identification and into more nuanced approaches to understanding individuals lived experiences.

Often "identity" is used to capture a person's commitment to their racial or ethnic group, their attachment to it and is discussed in terms of having a "strong" or "weak" racial identity. The students in this study, especially the Commanders and Ambassadors, have a similar level of commitment to their racial identity. They like being black, are proud to be black, and see their racial identity as an important part of themselves. The variation presented here is not about the strength of attachment to a racial identity, but rather is focused on describing the bounds of what they are attached to in the first place. The variation that exists focuses on the variation in how these students experience being black, and what they believe is the best way forward for a black person in this world.

This work makes a statement that there is no one singular black identity, no one set of beliefs, values, norms or attitudes that can serve as a universal measuring stick for blackness. I am not interested in dissecting who is more black than whom or who is the right or wrong kind of black. Instead, when I discuss cultural schemas of racial identity, I am referring to the patterned ways in which individuals take shared, publicly available cultural information, and use it to help process what it means to be black in the world. I am interested in meaning making

around blackness, and the variation therein. I am much less interested in documenting *who* is black, and more concerned with *how* individuals are black. How do they interpret what it means to be black? How do these interpretations shape their interactions with their social world? This work looked at these questions in the higher educational context, but the approach could be taken in many other social spaces.

While previous scholars acknowledged variation in how black people made sense of being black, often that was tied to demographic factors, such as social class, neighborhood, geographic location, and ethnicity. I find that these factors do matter for how students come to understand their race, but do not explain all the variation therein. The students in this study grew up on the internet and in a world with access to understandings of race outside of their local context. These students draw upon memes they have seen on Instagram, television shows such as ABC's *Black-ish*, and their interactions with friends from around the world they have met online as they conceptualize their black racial identity. Our understanding of racial identity going forward must have room to consider how individuals draw from publicly available, shared, taken for granted schemas.

A schemas approach to racial identity is also useful in considering the historical moment in which identity is constructed. Focusing on how schemas are applied at a specific time helps us to see how cultural schemas are created and destroyed over time. As schemas are created in response to the material constraints placed on actors (Ridgeway 2006) it is important to consider how they are being created, applied, and destroyed over time. These students grew up with a black man as President of the United States. This fact matters greatly for how they conceive of what is possible and how the nation thinks of black people. These students were also in college for the election of Donald Trump. Now, faced with new information, these students must find a

way to explain both these realities. Schemas give us a tool to understand how people process new information and make sense of their place in the world. In this way, schemas prove useful as a way to understand the temporal component of racial identity. Sociological theory of racial identity must be able to capture these changes in identity over time.

It is also important to consider that the racial identities of these students are under continual development. There was movement in between interviews of how students understood what it meant to be black. The most extreme example comes from Jacqueline. Jacqueline was in many ways the strongest advocate for a color-blind ideology. It is because of her interview that I revised my interview protocol to include more explicit questions about the concept. However, when Jacqueline walked into her Sophomore year interview, she immediately apologized for her earlier comments. As I turned on the tape recorder, she said, “Actually, it's kind of weird when you emailed me because I was thinking about our interview and I just know I said some ignorant stuff. I’ve changed, a lot has changed.” Jacqueline was excited to clarify her thoughts on her racial identity and to share her new thoughts on what it means to be black.

> My answers from last time have changed. They've drastically changed. I was just so blinded about color and race. And now I'm like no matter how blind you try to be, you are not. It's always there. Your blackness or your color is ingrained in you and I felt like a lot of stuff from the last interview was about how, "If you don't see it, then it's fine." I'm like, "No, you always see it." It's kind of sad that I have to come back. It's really sad. The way I brought it up before, it's not like that anymore at all.

Jacqueline was frustrated and sad that she had this realization. The schema she was using to interpret her surroundings was no longer working for her. She realized that being color-blind was not entirely possible and there were still elements of race and racism that existed, no matter how

hard she tried to ignore them. I asked her what she thought brought about the change and she told me the following:

> Experiences, being around people, conversations. I've just been watching what's been going on campus and in the news and just seeing everything and it's a lot. When I talk about being here and then actively seeing your opinion as a person of color being shut down. People actually having to debate as to whether or not you have the right to protest your rights. That changed it for me. There's always color. Even black and white TV's you still see black. There's no such thing as no color.

Jacqueline's confidence in her worldview had been shaken as she encountered the everyday racism of her campus and in the larger world. However, she had not completely abandoned the Conscientious Objector schema. When I asked her what her ideal future for race relations would be, Jacqueline revisited the ideas she put forth in her original interview.

> Ideally, no point of separating each other by race as it is. Even in biology now, going through, they're learning about melanin and the genes that produce color. That's all it is. It's just science. It's color. Labels constructed by man to separate people and I feel like in an ideal world there would be no such thing as racism because we're the same species. People love to say color is only skin deep. It is true.

This reveals that she has not completely abandoned her stance that the scientific basis of race shows it to be an inherently flawed concept. However, her experiences in college were adding new levels of nuance for this worldview. She now recognizes that a truly color blind world is farther off than she thought, yet she still desires this outcome.

> Knowing that's not ever going to be a reality, I hope that we can come to terms with each other equally. Even if there is a race aspect to it, don't treat race as the defining factor. The factor as to why you decide if someone is worthy. I'm saying there's no reason to look at person and you say, "No, you're not worth this or you're not worthy of this because you have a few more of melanin in your body." It's ridiculous. That's it. The more I think about it, I'm upset because seriously it comes down to science about who produces

> more melanin than someone else and you're saying because I have more color in my body I'm not worthy as much as you are.

In these quotes Jacqueline is continuing to define and refine what it means to be black. Her original perceptions and use of the cultural schema helps her to make sense of this new information and square it with her existing ideology. This process is complex, messy, and situational.

In these moments, we see college serving as a key site for identity exploration. As France Winddance Twine (1997:233) says in her study of biracial black girls attending UC Berkeley, "The Berkeley experience challenged their ideology of individualism...the politicized communities of color would not allow them to avoid claiming a nonwhite racial identity." A similar experience was occurring for Jacqueline and other respondents, yet the allegiance to an individualistic racial identity was not due to their suburban upbringing, or biracial parentage, but rather their adherence to a understanding of their black racial identity. These schemas gave them a base from which to explore and discover, and were a helpful tool for respondents to process the new information presented to them about race on campus.

Implications for Race Relations

Understanding how individuals adopt and use schemas is useful as we seek to grapple with the present and future of race relations. As demonstrated in this project, the schema these students use have consequences for both the intra-racial and interracial boundaries they draw. For example, all the students in the study were aware of the "angry black woman" trope, but made value judgments about the appropriate way to respond to it. The Commanders desire to be carefree black girls alienated them from other black students who found their strategy to be

inappropriate. This may create an even smaller pool of potential friends or meaningful relationships.

The existence of all three schemas themselves is also an important contribution for race scholars. It may be surprising to some that black people could and would adhere to a color-blind ideology. While much of the work on color-blindness focuses on the white racial habitus, this study provides evidence that black people also can adopt a color-blind schema. Similar to work that measures changes in racial attitudes, it is important for scholars to continue to monitor how and when schemas are used under changing structural conditions. It may be the case that as material conditions improve for some black Americans, more begin to adopt a Conscientious Objectors schema, as they feel that a strong attachment to a racial identity is no longer necessary. Or, as more progressive politicians and policies gain traction, coupled with changing conversations about identity politics in the political sphere, more individuals may adopt a Commanders schema. It is important to continue to monitor and evaluate how changes in racial sensemaking map onto the existing cultural moment.

Understanding these shifts in cultural schemas is important because how we define problems matters for how we address them. For the Commanders, problems of race relations are structural and the solutions involve radical structural and institutional change. For the Ambassadors, the problems of race relations are individual, and the most pressing solutions involve creating opportunities for individual advancement. Conscientious Objectors highlighted cultural deficits and saw many issues of race relations as being the result of unproductive black culture. Future research should consider how the use of a particular schema maps onto support for particular policy solutions.

Implications for Higher Education Scholars and Professionals

Understandings of racial identity matter for more than just the way in which respondents see themselves, but also for the actions they take in response to the structural conditions they find themselves in. There are long-term considerations for this, as scholars and practitioners alike try to understand and improve the experience of black students on campus. As universities are concerned with diversity, equity, and inclusion, it is important for them to recognize the intraracial diversity of minoritized groups. This includes not only the pre-college experiences of these students, but also providing consideration for variation in racial identity.

As universities and practitioners attempt to understand how and why black students are sorted into majors that lead to lower-paying jobs, and how to ensure that black students are taking advantage of the social and professional networking opportunities present on elite college campuses, they need to be mindful that not all students respond to these structural conditions in the same way. By looking at how the variation in how the students on campus understand majors, career paths, and clubs through their cultural schemas of racial identity, we can see that black campus experience is far from a monolith. Student affairs professionals would be wise to consider not just the availability of a variety of pathways for black students, but attentive to the why that these students might be drawn to the respective pathways through college. For some, the major and intended career themselves must benefit black people. For others, the major and intended career must give them a chance to break barriers or be a role model. For others still, the career must match with their individual passions and interests. Programs and policies that attempt to recruit and support black students moving through the university must be responsive to this variation.

Previous researchers have demonstrated the importance of pre-college experience in how students are prepared to interact with majority white institutions which prioritize white middle class social and cultural capital. I argue that in addition to that preparation, how students understand their racial identity matters for how they interact with these institutions. As Johnson (2019) argues, to support these students, universities should establish and support institutionalized policies, programs, and norms, that acknowledge and support both the development of intra-racial and interracial peer networks. The students in my study desired deep and meaningful connections to the university community at large, and not just the black community. While spaces for students to connect with same race peers are seen as valuable, these students also desire to be part of the university community at large and to be seen, heard, and respected throughout the university halls, and not solely relegated to majority minority spaces. These students desire black campus organizations that serve multiple functions, including but not limited to: social and cultural enrichment, a safe haven from racism and discrimination, professional development, networking opportunities, and activism and community organizing. Therefore, it is important that black students, and all students on campus have full access to a range of pathways that can support their growth and development both professionally and personally.

As universities grapple with their diversity, equity, and inclusion of their campuses, it is important to consider the variation within populations. One key finding here is that the Commanders were most involved in the planning efforts of the University's strategic plan, while feeling most harmed by the university's current climate. These were the students attending meetings, planning sessions, and doing the organizing work to make the university better, often at the expense of their own academic performance and mental health. While the Commanders

were doing this work, other students got to reap the benefits of their efforts, showing up to meetings when they were convenient to their schedules or when they could see a tangible benefit from doing so. The Commanders paid the price for this involvement, while all other students were able to enjoy the fruit of the Commanders labor. As we keep in mind how to serve students, we must consider the labor they contribute to the university, and find ways to value and support those contributions. Four of the Commanders mentioned seeking help at the campus counseling and psychology center, and lamented that there was only one black counselor who was often booked. For these students, a black mental health professional was ideal to help them process their experiences. However, the university was not set up to provide that support.

Implications for the Students

Racial identity is complex, messy, and often in flux. In addition to deciding what they want they want to major in, who they want to date, and what party they want to attend, students are making sense of what it means to be black on campus. As I have presented here, these decisions are often interrelated. Students are using their understanding of their black racial identity to make sense of numerous aspects of their college experience. As they interface with the university and life beyond the college gates, it is important to restate that there is no right or wrong way to be black. These students are inundated with messages about the appropriate way to navigate this world. These messages come from each other, from their parents, from social and traditional media, from their universities, from politicians, and almost every facet of American life. Schemas help individuals organize this influx of information, process it, and strategize for action. Strong moral and ethical commitments are attached to these schemas, and they are relied upon until they become almost invisible. Whether they are Commanders, seeking to rally troops to support black students and unapologetically fight racism when and wherever they see it, be

they Ambassadors, seeking to break barriers, change perceptions, and serve as positive examples, or still yet Conscientious Objectors, focusing on their individual pursuits and passions, seeking to define themselves on their own terms, black students are doing all they can to survive and thrive.

No matter which schema an individual adopts, they deserve to have a college experience that supports them and allows them to achieve their personal and professional goals. College should not be a battlefield for one's humanity, but for far too many students it is just that. The fault lies with the institutions who have created these structural conditions for students to navigate, and not with the adaptive strategies used by the students.

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APPENDIX A.
Freshman Year Interview Schedule

Thank you for agreeing to interview with me. In this interview I just want to get to know your experiences and the way you see the world.

Introduction

I just want to start off by getting to know a little bit more about you.

- Where are you from? What was it like to grow up there?
- Tell me about your family.
- Who lived in the house with you when you were in high school? (Parents/ siblings/ grandparents, etc.)
- What was a typical weeknight like in your house when you were a teenager? What was it like on the weekend?
- What do your parents do? How far did they go in school?
- What are your siblings doing now?

Adolescent Experiences (High school and life outside of high school)

- Tell me about your high school.

  Probes: Size? School type (neighborhood, private, charter, etc.)? Racial composition? What was your school like academically?

- What was high school like for you?

  Probes: activities and clubs, job, friends, types of classes taken

- What are your closest friends from high school doing now?

Early Thoughts about College and the College Search

- Tell me the story of when you first thought about going to college.
- How did you come to know you were going to college? Did you ever consider not going?

- Tell me about some of the conversations you had with your family members about college.
- How far did your parents go in school? What do you know about their educational experiences?
- How far did your siblings or other close family members go in school? What were their experiences like?

- How does your family feel about your decision to go to college?
  Probe: Parents, teachers, guidance counselors
- What was the college search process like for you?
  Probes: Timing, college visits, # of applications
- What types of schools did you apply for? Why?
  Probe: Community colleges, SLAC, HBCUs, online schools, etc.
- Were there any types of schools that you knew you didn't want to go to? Who do you think those schools are good for?
  Community colleges, online schools, HBCUs, Ivy leagues, SLAC

- Tell me the story of how you came to Michigan.
- How does your family feel about your decision to go to Michigan? Did they want you to go anywhere else?

- What was it like figuring out how to pay for school?
- What kind of advice did you get about how to pay for school? Parents, teachers, friends, etc.?
- What would you have done if you couldn't have paid for college or didn't get accepted?

- Did you or did you think about taking a break between high school and college? Why or why not? What would you have done during the break if you took one?

Thoughts about your time in college

- Did you feel academically prepared for college? How so?
- Did you feel socially prepared for college? How so?
- What do you think is/will be the most difficult part about college?
- Some people find it hard to remain close with their friends back home once they go to college, especially with those who did not go to school. Do you anticipate or feel your relationships with your family and friends back home changing while you are in school?
- Tell me your thoughts about picking a major. What is important to you in a major? What are you considering?
- Does your family have an opinion about your major? How much does their opinion on your major matter to you?
- What is your purpose for being in college?
- How would you say you did academically last semester? What were your expectations? Did you meet them? Why or why not?
- If you could make the same amount or more money without a college degree, would you still get one?
- Are there any situations in which you think you won't get a degree? What are those?
- How would your family react if you didn't finish college? What about your friends or community back home?

General Thoughts about college

Now, I'm going to ask you a range of questions about higher education in America in general.

- Now a lot of high schools and districts are implementing college for all plans, with the hope that everyone will get some form of higher education. Do you think it is important for everyone to have a college degree?

- What are some situations in which it would be ok for someone to not get a degree?

- Are people who have college educations different from those who don't have them? If so, how?

- Some people say that student loans are a great investment in your future. Others say that loans should be avoided so as to remain debt free. What do you think about taking out loans for school? Should people take out loans or go to schools they can afford without having to accrue debt?

- Some parents feel that they should pay for their child's education as much as they can, so as to help their child get ahead. Other parents feel that their child should work and take out loans to pay for their own school, as it a lesson in responsibility and adulthood. What do you think a parents role in paying for college should be?
    Probe: Where do your parents fall on this spectrum? Where do you wish they fell?

- What is the purpose of college?

Race and College

- Do you think that college matters differently for people of different races?

- Is it important for black people specifically to go to college?

    - If you were mentoring a black high school boy with a 3.5 GPA who didn't want to go to college, what advice would you give him? What about if he had 2.3 GPA?

        - Would it matter how much money his parents had? Would it matter that he's black? Would it matter that he's male?

    - Why do you think it is that blacks attend college at lower rates than their white and Asian peers?

- Why do you think it is that blacks graduate from college at lower rates than their white and Asian peers?

- A lot of people are talking about it now, and I'm wondering for you, what is it like to be black here at the University of Michigan ?

- Do you feel like there is a black community on campus? Would you consider yourself part of that community? Why or why not?

- Overall, how would you say the black students on campus are doing? (Academically, socially, etc.)

- What would you say are some of the biggest challenges for black students?

- What do you think the university could do to better help the black students here on campus?

- What do you think black students should do to help themselves on campus?

Racial Identity

Now, we're going to transition and talk more specifically about race and how you think about it.

- So far, I've been using the term black in this interview, but some people prefer to be called African-American, some prefer person of color, and others don't think we should use racial categories at all. Do you have a preference? Why would you pick one label over another?

- What does it mean to be black?

- Can you tell me about a time where you were especially proud to be black?
- What's your favorite thing about being black?

- Can you tell me about a time where you were embarrassed or ashamed to be black?

- What's your least favorite thing about being black?

- Did your parents talk to you about race? What sorts of things did they say?

- Are there rules to being black?

- Have you heard people say there are certain things "black people don't do"? What are some of those things? What do you think about those things? Did you hear that from your family, friends, comedian, etc.?

- Have you ever heard the term acting black? Do you think it's possible to "act" black? (Probe: if so, what would that look like?)

- What are some of the stereotypes you've heard about black people? Do you think there is any truth to those?

- Is it important to you to have black friends? Why or why not?

- Is it important to you to have romantic relationships with other black people?

- How would you describe the state of blacks in America?

- What would you say some of the biggest challenges facing African-Americans are?

- When you think about your own future, do you think that your race will matter in how your life turns out?

Class Identity

- People define social classes in a lot of different ways. I'm interested to know how you think about social classes in America.

- So, without naming a particular person, can you describe the life of someone who you would say is poor/low-income (what kind of job do they have, how much money do they make, how much education, what do they do for fun, etc.)
- Describe the lifestyle of someone who you would say is working class.
- Describe the lifestyle of someone who you would say is middle class.
- Describe the lifestyle of someone you would say is upper middle class.
- Describe the lifestyle of someone who you would say is an elite/rich.
- Do you know people who live these lifestyles? Which ones don't you know?

- How would you describe the social class position of your family growing up? What makes you say that?
- What does it mean to be a part of that social class?
- When did you realize that was your social class? Can you tell me about a time where your social class was apparent?
- Do you think your social class changed as you were growing up? (Parent lose a job or gain a new one, divorce, parent went back to school, etc.) What was that change like for your family? What were the biggest differences?
- Can you tell me about a time when you were proud of your class identity?
- Can you tell me about a time growing up where you wished you were part of a different social class?
- What social class do you think most black people are a part of? Why do you think that is so?

- What social class do you associate with white people? Why do you think that is so?

- Are you most comfortable around people of your same social class? Same race?

- Are you comfortable around people of your same race but a different social class? Same social class but different race?

- Do you think that social classes operate differently for black people and non-blacks? For example, is it the same to be poor and black as it is to be poor and white? Can you think of a way it might be different? Can you think of a way it's the same?

- What about the black middle class and the white middle class. How might they be the same? Are their ways you think they are different?

- Do you think college matters differently depending on your social class? Are the stakes of doing well in college different for people depending on their class background?

Thoughts about the future

- Have you thought about where you see yourself in 5 years? 10 years? 30 years?
- What kind of life will you be living?

- What will your life in 20 years look like in comparison to your parent's lives at that age?

- Where do you want to be in the future? Where do you think you'll be? Where do you think your family wants you to be in the future?

- What does success look like for you? How will you know if you've achieved it?

These are all the questions I have, and we've reached the end of the interview. Is there anything you'd like to add based on what we talked about? Something you want to clarify or that we didn't talk about that you think we should have?

Appendix B.

Sophomore Year Interview Schedule

Thank you for agreeing to interview with me. In this interview, I just want to catch up with you and see how you've been since we last talked and to see if your worldviews have changed at all.

- **Reflections on Last Year**
- Overall, how would you describe your first year in college?

- What were some of the highlights of the year for you?
- What were some of the most challenging moments you faced in your first year?
- How did you spend your summer?
    - How did you come to discover your summer plans?
- This summer there were quite a few videos that spread around of police killings. Did you keep up with any of those cases?
    - Why or why not?
- Did you spend time with your family over the summer?
- After being away and then coming back, do you think anything has changed with your relationship with your family?
- Did you ever consider transferring schools or not coming back to Michigan?
- **This Academic Year**
- How is this semester going so far?
- What courses are you taking?
- Does this semester seem to be any different from last year in any ways? How so?
- Where are you on picking a major? Last time you were _____? Has that changed at all?
- Does your family have an opinion about your major? How much does their opinion on your major matter to you?

- What is your purpose for being in college?
- Are there any situations in which you think you won't get a degree? What are those?
- How would your family react if you didn't finish college? What about your friends or community back home?

Campus Life

- What student organizations are you a part of?
- Are there other organizations or things on campus that you would like to be involved with?
- Tell me about a moment where you felt like you truly belonged on campus
- Tell me about a moment where you felt like you didn't belong.
- Do you feel like you have a sense of community on campus?
- Tell me about your 5 closest friends here. How did you meet them, what is their major, race, gender, etc.
- **Race and Campus**
- A lot of people are talking about it now, and I'm wondering for you, what is it like to be black here at the University of Michigan?
- There have been some racially charged instances here on campus this semester, with the posting of flyers around campus. What did you think about the flyers that were posted? How did you find out about them?
- Do you feel like there is a black community on campus? Would you consider yourself part of that community? Why or why not?
- Overall, how would you say the black students on campus are doing? (Academically, socially, etc.)
- What would you say are some of the biggest challenges for black students?
- What do you think the university could do to better help the black students here on campus?
- What do you think black students should do to help themselves on campus?

- **Race in America**

  - How would you describe the state of blacks in America?

  - What would you say some of the biggest challenges facing African-Americans are?

  - How important is your race to how you see yourself? Do you think that has changed since you've come to college?

  - Do you think the way that you think about race in general has changed since coming to college?

  - **Future Plans**

  - When you think about your own future, do you think that your race will matter in how your life turns out?

  - What will your life in 20 years look like in comparison to your parent's lives at that age?

  - Where do you want to be in the future? Where do you think you'll be? Where do you think your family wants you to be in the future?

  - What does success look like for you? How will you know if you've achieved it?

  - What are you most excited for in your future?

  - What are you most nervous about?

-

Appendix C.

Respondent Descriptions

Commanders

Amanda is the daughter of a tax attorney turned realtor and a doctor. She grew up in suburban Maryland with her parents and two younger siblings. Amanda has very fair skin and dark brown hair, a point that she consistently raised when talking about her race. She was aware that her complexion affected the way in which people saw her, and that sometimes she needed to somewhat announce herself as black so that people knew and treated her accordingly. Amanda was in the IB program in high school and was very involved in mock trial and model U.N. She said that her high school was very poor and students struggled academically, although her IB program was separated from the rest of the students in the school. Amanda was considering majoring in a social science field and planned on becoming a lawyer.

Jade was raised in Chicago by a single mother with her older sister. Her mother has a master's degree in a humanities field and moved between jobs throughout Jade's upbringing. Jade described her family as being poor without a poor mindset. There were times when utilities were shut off and her family did not have anything to eat for dinner. Throughout this, her mother stressed education, but Jade had a passion for music and spent as much time as possible playing in jazz clubs. Her passion for music led her to college to train with the very best in her field. She sought the musical training and connections, and not the degree. She figured she would only stay in college as long as she felt like she was learning her craft.

Jamila grew up in Kalamazoo, Michigan with both of her parents in a middle class predominantly white neighborhood. She has a much older brother who lives with his wife and children nearby. Her mother works in insurance and her father in medical sales. However, she attended a predominantly black school, where she was involved in competitive cheerleading and many school organizations. Neither of her parents completed college, but Jamila bases a lot of her drive for education on friendly competition with her older brother, who earned his Master's degree.

Lacey grew up in Detroit with her parents and two older brothers. Lacey was not very close to her brothers who she describes as being "in the streets." Lacey left home two hours before school every morning to take the unreliable city bus to school. Once there she focused on school, loading up her schedule with as many Advanced Placement classes as possible. Lacey's mother works in retail and her father in a factory job. Lacey has wanted to be an OB/GYN her entire life, and is planning on completing her medical school requirements while majoring in English. She cites Dr. Oz as an inspiration and wants to be able to communicate well with her patients.

Megan's dry sense of humor rang throughout our interview. She was raised in a predominantly white suburb until high school, then moved to a predominantly black suburb of Detroit. She grew up with her mother, stepfather, and younger sister. Her mother works in insurance and her father works in Information Technology. Megan laughed when telling me about her high school experience. She described herself as being very shy and awkward, but people considered her to be "uppity". She was the editor of her high school newspaper, but other than that not very involved in the goings on of her school. Megan plans on majoring in Women's Studies and to take the requirements to attend a Physician's Assistant program after graduation. As much as she would love to be a mid-wife, Megan says that she would drop out of school tomorrow for the opportunity to be Kim Kardashian's best friend and live as a socialite.

Nina is tall with light brown skin. Her hair hangs in long box braids. Nina grew up in Ann Arbor with her mother. She has a relationship with her father and her half-siblings, but is much closer to her mother's side of the family. Her parents met in college and got pregnant with Nina soon after. Her mother left with an associates degree, while her father went on through graduate school. Nina describes her childhood as growing up poor. Her mother struggled to make ends meet through her job as a teacher's assistant at an elementary school. Nina entered college as a music major but quickly realized that the music school was not the right fit for her as she did not have the passion to be successful. She was considering psychology as an option for a new major.

Rukayat met me in my office wearing fuzzy boots, black leggings and a college sweatshirt. She spoke exuberantly and swung her long, wavy hair weave around as she spoke throughout the interview. Rukayat is the daughter of African immigrants and was raised in a very small town in Michigan. She went to high school at a boarding school in the South. She has two older siblings who were out of the house by the time she was born. Rukayat's father is a doctor and her mother is a homemaker. She plans to major in psychology, with the goal of becoming a clinical psychologist focusing on music therapy.

Taylor is tall and thin and from the way she walked in my office, I could tell she was an athlete. She ran track throughout high school and planned to attempt to walk on to the Michigan track team. Taylor was born and raised in Ann Arbor, and her parents met while in school at Michigan. Her parents are now divorced, but Taylor has a close relationship with them both. Her mother is a preschool teacher and her father works as an accountant. Taylor plans on following in her father's footsteps and majoring in business.

Tori was raised on Detroit's east side with her parents and brother and sister. Her mother works in childcare and her father is a maintenance worker. She went to a small charter school from K-12.Tori's mother attended college for two years, until she needed to drop out to take care of a sick relative. Her father did not attend college. Tori has a passion for makeup and wanted to go to Cosmetology school, but felt pressure to attend college and get a "real degree" and not go to a trade school. She started college as an art major, but very quickly realized that art would not be a good fit for her and is now considering transferring to psychology and women's studies. In addition to her studies, she is working at a makeup counter in the mall.

Ambassadors

Aaron is originally from Detroit, Michigan, but his family moved to North Carolina when he graduated high school. He described his class standing as working class, with his parents often taking multiple jobs to make ends meet. He is very soft spoken and gives a quiet chuckle at the end of most of his sentences. Aaron's parents did not attend college and he said they struggled to make it through high school. However, they were very insistent that he and his sister, who is twelve years older than him, attend school. She graduated college and now works as a teacher. While always close to his family, Aaron became even closer with them after his father suffered a stroke during Aaron's final years of high school.

Anthony is tall and dark skin with closely cropped hair. He has a presence about himself as he moves through the room. Anthony was raised on the east coast with his mother and older sister. His parents, who both immigrated from Jamaica as teenagers, never married, but he has a relationship with his father, who lives in the south with Anthony's stepmother and half sister. His mother returned to school when Anthony was in middle school, earned a graduate degree and began a career in sales. However, Anthony self-identifies as poor, noting that he shared a small, cramped apartment with his mother and sister throughout his childhood. Anthony was very involved in high school playing sports, and taking leadership roles in several high school organizations. He pushed himself academically and took 11 Advanced Placement courses in his neighborhood public school. Anthony always knew that he would attend college and did not see it as a choice for himself. Anthony never considered college as optional, as he took it as a given that he would matriculate to a top school. Anthony had always done well in math and science courses, so he was often told he would make a good engineer. He chose Michigan after he conducted careful research and determined that Michigan had the best engineering program that he was likely to be accepted into.

Brittany was raised in Saginaw, Michigan with her mother, stepfather, and six siblings, four of which were older and no longer living at home. Her tall, athletic frame showed her years of playing volleyball and running track. She said that she was so involved in high school with sports and leadership positions in student organizations because she "didn't want to go home because there wasn't anything to do." Brittany said that for most of her childhood, the time before her mother married her stepfather and became a manager at her job, her family was low-income as her mother struggled to make ends meet. Now she says they are more stable, and by her characterization, middle class. Brittany spoke lovingly of her mother's determination to attend community college while working full time as a manager at a convenience store and caring for Brittany and her two younger sisters. Her mother's commitment to completing her associate's degree at 52 years old served as motivation for Brittany to pursue higher education. She applied to 15 engineering schools and was accepted to each except for Michigan, so she decided that this must be the best for her as it has a "higher standard." She hoped to transfer into the engineering program in her sophomore year.

Dominique grew up in Detroit surrounded by her large extended family. While her parents are not married, in high school she spent time at both of their homes, at times living with each of them or with cousins. Both of her parents were entrepreneurs, but Dominique was not quite sure of the details of either of their businesses. While neither of her biological parents attended college, her stepmother had recently completed a law degree. In this way, Dominique felt like she was living between two worlds. One, with her mother and her younger brother where she lived in a small cramped and crowded home with lots of extended family trying to get by financially, and another where her stepmother took the family on international vacations each year and she had her own bedroom. Experiencing social class differentials within her family inspired Dominique to attend and complete college. She is majoring in Screen Arts and Culture and hopes to become a film director.

Evelyn came into my office for her interview clutching her flowered backpack that was covered in buttons and pins for her favorite bands, books, and tv shows. She was born in East Africa and moved to the states when she was 4 years old. Her father was in school in the U.S. when she was born, and she her mother, and two older brothers moved to be with him. Evelyn's father has earned several advanced degrees and is currently working on a PhD. Her mother is a nurse. Evelyn felt like she was always around higher education, with her father being in school for most of her life. This, coupled with a sense of responsibility to her family still in Kenya who did not have the opportunity to attend school, made Evelyn feel like college was an inevitable path. Evelyn described her family as being upper middle class, but acknowledged that things were more difficult when one of her parents were in school at various points in her childhood. They live in an affluent suburb in a predominantly white neighborhood. Evelyn plans on majoring in neuroscience with the goal of attending medical school.

Jasmine is a short, dark brown skin black girl who carries herself with confidence, poise, and a bit of attitude. Her hair was perfectly cut in a short bob with ear length bob, pressed straight with a side part. She grew up in Detroit, Michigan living mostly with her mother. She spent some time with her father and young half-brother. While Jasmine was in high school, her mother was in graduate school for education. Jasmine attended a small charter high school with a reputation for sending all of its predominantly black students to college. Jasmine is very artistic and loves to paint and draw, but is planning to major in engineering with a goal of becoming a consultant.

Kiara grew up in Chicago with her mother and stepfather and older brother. When Kiara was young, her older brother was shot in a robbery. His best friend was killed in that encounter, and her brother was seriously injured. Kiara describes this incident and her brother's recovery afterward as the defining incident of her childhood. Because of her brother's experience, Kiara volunteered with people with disabilities in high school and intends to major in pre-physical therapy in college. Both of Kiara's parents attended some college but did not graduate. Her stepfather is retired and her mother works in real estate.

Lauren was born and raised on the east coast of the United States. Her parents divorced while she was in middle school, but she is still very close to her large family, with many extended relatives living in close proximity. Lauren's mother is an executive assistant and her father works in a

factory. Both parents completed high school and her mother completed a few years of college before getting pregnant with Lauren's older sister. Lauren grew up in a very diverse neighborhood with a large hispanic population and lots of European immigrants. Her father is Afro-Latino, with his parents moving to the states from Central America shortly before he was born. Lauren described her family as being poor and discussed several times when the lights were out as her mother had been unable to pay the utility bill. She plans on becoming a Psychiatrist, and is majoring in Biopsychology, Cognition, and Neuroscience.

LeNae is from outside of Detroit Michigan, where she grew up with her parents and older brother. She went to a predominantly black high school and was involved in cheerleading and track and field. LeNae identifies as middle class, saying that her parents make over $150,000 combined from their jobs in car sales and car manufacturing.LeNae says that even though her parents did not finish college themselves, from an early age her parents regularly told her that it was her job to get into college and their job to figure out how to pay for it. At Michigan, LeNae plans on majoring in Women's Studies and fulfilling all of the requirements for medical school with the hope of becoming an Obstetrician-Gynecologist.

Rebecca is from Detroit, Michigan. She has very fair skin with freckles and her reddish-brown hair was styled in shoulder length box braids. Rebecca noted that people often commented on her light skin and asked if she was "really black," much to her annoyance. Rebecca grew up with her parents and 3 younger siblings. She has 3 older half siblings that sometimes stayed with her family as well. Rebecca's mother is a retired teacher who home schooled Rebecca and her younger siblings, including her special needs brother, through middle school. Rebecca credits her father for her drive to attend college. He did not attend college and shared with Rebecca how he feels that held him back professionally. He currently works as a mechanic. Rebecca plans on majoring in environmental science and perhaps attending law school after graduation.

Conscientious Objectors

Emmanuel is the son of two East African immigrants, who now work as accountants in suburban Michigan. He described his family as being upper middle class. He went to a small, Christian, majority white high school and played several sports, although soccer was his focus. He is soft spoken and laid back, providing a cool demeanor throughout both interviews. Emmanuel plans to be a doctor and is considering majoring in Biology.

Jacqueline was raised by her mother and grandmother on the east side of Detroit in a neighborhood that she described as being very dangerous. Her mother works as a home health aide. Because of the condition of her neighborhood, Jacqueline has been looking forward to getting out of her neighborhood her entire life and loves that aspect of college. Jacqueline has always wanted to be a doctor and plans on majoring in neuroscience. However, she is now realizing how little exposure she has had to all the career options that are out there.

Malik grew up in Grand Rapids, Michigan with his older sister and parents. His parents divorced when he was in late elementary school. His mother works as a home health aide and his father

works in sales. He was very involved with robotics all throughout high school and is an avid video game player. Malik was very soft-spoken throughout our interview and was never very forthcoming with answers to any of my questions.

Melahni was raised in Detroit by her Pastor father and her stay at home mother along with her eight brothers and sisters. Melahni says that her family probably would have been classified as poor as her father was the sole income for her large family. However, she describes her childhood as lots of fun, having a house full of people to play with and spend time with. She spent most of her time outside of school in church activities, and her commitment to her faith continues in school. In college, Melahni began as pre-med, but at the time of our interview was considering applying to the school of nursing.

Safiyah was born in the Caribbean, spent some time in West Africa after her parents divorced, but raised primarily in Dearborn, Michigan with her mother. In some ways, Dearborn's large Muslim population was a good fit for her Muslim family, but overall Safiyah did not feel very connected to her hometown. In high school Safiyah took a rigorous schedule and earned an associate degree through a concurrent enrollment program. Safiyah's mother completed high school and has been working towards her bachelors' degree on and off throughout Safiyah's life. After meticulously researching several career paths, Safiyah settled on a Computer Science major.

Simone is a first-generation America, migrating from West Africa to the states with her parents and older brother from when she was a toddler. Her family settled in a suburban Michigan town where her father is a pharmacist and her mother is a stay at home mom. Simone was very involved in high school, busying her time with as many extra-curricular activities as possible. and now plans on becoming a doctor. Simone had a bubbly energy throughout the interview and often laughed at her own jokes.

Timothy is the son of two African immigrants. His father works as a doctor, and his mother as an accountant. Timothy is very tall, and carried himself with a laid-back ease throughout our interview. He is a business major and approached most subject through the prism of corporate America and what it would take to be successful in a major company.